

# 秘蜜

黒の誓い

著 ひとしずくP

イラスト 鈴ノ助



ひとしずくPが描く少女たちの峻烈な愛――

ひとりの天使が、恋に――堕ちた

クリプトン・フューチャー・メディア公社

PHP研究所 定価：本体1,200円(税別)

# Prologue

A breeze gently brushed against their cheeks.

The town, overlooked by the deserted temple ruins, was dyed in the beautiful orange of the sunset.

From the roof of the Tandelman Temple, there was a clear view of the townscape of the human realm.

Although it was ignorantly called the place closest to God, currently it wasn't being used as a place of oracle, and only as far as being a spot for angels to rest their wings. Those that approached it were few.

The angel that took the appearance of a girl, with sorrowful blue eyes, quietly clenched her fists.

“Will you go, no matter what ...?”

Not even a shadow of the girl's usual bright, cheerful demeanor showed in her expression.

“...Rin. What do you think of this world?”

Without answering the girl's question, the angel that looked like a young man gently laughed. Crystal

clear blue eyes that seemed to draw you in. For some reason, whenever she saw that smile, she would always fall into a helplessly saddened mood.

“What do I think...? ...We are angels. I don’t understand humans very well, but... Angels have their own world, and humans have theirs. Every one of us are all just living fulfilling our missions in our respective worlds, aren’t we?”

This world—It was the masterpiece made by God pouring in His love and compassion. She had no complaints with this world. Or rather, she held no doubts towards God or the world He had created.

“I see... I think that God is cruel.”

She felt a shock from the boy’s words, as if she’d been struck on the head. Up until now, she had never heard him desecrate God or the other angels. No matter when, he never showed negative emotions. Always, with a warm gaze and gentle smile, he was more compassionate than anyone, with his comrades, with God, and with this world.

What could have possibly changed that?

With a gentle tone, he continued.

“God created us angels before humans. We’re proud just to be loved by God. But God didn’t grant *it* to us. He didn’t allow us to have it. The ‘most important thing’ that the living beings in this world have.”

The girl felt troubled. She didn’t know what the boy was talking about. No, it was better said that she couldn’t comprehend it.

“‘The most important thing’ ...? That’s ‘life,’ isn’t it ...?”

“Life is a necessity. But have you ever thought about ‘for what reason’ that there is life?”

“Angels live to serve as the connection between the human world and God and Heaven. This world’s entire well-being and circulation is our only mission. For this reason, we devote our whole lives. Hasn’t that always been so for you?! You are my very important... my very precious comrade! I don’t

want to lose you! So, why...?!”

“Rin... Thank you.”

Suddenly, her view became wrapped in sheer white. Feeling warmth, she realized that she was being embraced. The warmth of his arms was the same as before. However, only the wings of his white angel appearance were pitch black, giving a stark contrast.

“My heart, in the past and now, hasn’t changed at all. This body, this life... for what reason is it here...? Don’t you understand...? Whenever I’m happy, I can tell you *thank you* using these two arms, just like this.”

“But, those wings...? Why? How ...?!”

“For what reason am I living... One day, the time that you’ll understand that meaning will come, surely.”

“I don’t get it, I don’t understand! If you leave...! You’re my closest brethren... I-I thought you to be my most precious partner...!!”

Letting out the feelings that she'd been enduring, tears ran endlessly down her cheeks. The days spent with him were going to end. She didn't want that. It would be too lonely—

The boy's larger hand laid over her fist that had been tightly clenched, and gently lifted it. He dropped something in the palm of her hand. It was a small, cross-shaped earring—the one he always wore on his right ear.

“I'll give this to you. It's a charm that I've held precious next to my life, as I've lived as an angel until now. ...I'm sorry, Rin. Thank you... for everything.”

The orange sunset illuminated his jet-black wings. With elegant movements and lightly flapping wings, he fell into the amber-colored world spread out below.

The outstretched arm that sought to restrain him, grasped vainly at the air.

“ ”

Hearing his name shouted that last time, the boy looked back for a moment and laughed. Blurred by the glare of the backlight, a single something gleamed and shone on his cheek, then rolled down.

# Chapter 1

## Part 1: Apple

Gran Dios Temple, during the Round Table. The sacred place of oracle, closest to God.

The neatly-kept young man, with deep wrinkles formed between his eyebrows, was tapping his fingertips against the table in a repetitive, displeased way.

The archangel meeting that had started a while ago, continued to follow a perfectly parallel line without proceeding at all. Growing tired of feeling that there was no end in sight, he stood up from his seat with a clunk.

“What is it, Archangel Kaito?” Casually asked the old man sitting in a remarkably regal chair at the other



end of table. The man called Kaito answered without hiding his irritation.

“I’ve grown bored of this discussion that hasn’t progressed at all since earlier. I have other things to attend to, so please don’t mind me and continue.”

After he’d risen from his seat and said this, a young man with long hair in the adjacent seat tried to calm him.

“Now now, the meeting has only just begun, Lord Kaito, so won’t you stay with us a while long longer? There’s still time before the three o’clock tea.”

With a benevolent face and a gentle smile, the man who had rebuked Kaito, named Gaku, looked up at the giant clock engraved in the ceiling of the temple. The time was two o’clock. There still remained one hour until his important “tea time.”

Being unsuited for the orderly meeting, and after being remonstrated by the leisurely Gaku, Kaito sighed and sat down in his seat once more.

Today's topic of discussion was the situation of the prolonged war in Heaven.

The Great War of Heaven—

From now, it dated back about five thousand years. When the conflict between angels and demons intensified, there was a fierce battle where roughly half of Heaven was lost. The angels that guarded Heaven were reduced by more than half, and the half of the sacred paradise that was lost fell to the ground. The surviving angels desperately tried to nurture the source of all life, the “Tree of Life,” costing the energy from the circulation of lost souls. Since then, the main battlefield for the battle between angels and demons was moved to the human world, and still continued today. The faith in God from humans serves as the power that supports the entire “world” consisting of Heaven and the human world. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that this power, known as “divine power,” is what forms the world.

On the other hand, the world's hatred— negative sentiments born from obsolete, empty hearts, becomes the source of “dark power” for demons, and amplifies the power of the Devil, who rules over the demons.

Heaven and Hell seek to expand each of their own forces by controlling such emotions and actions of humans, all in order to prepare for the next direct confrontation, like that of the previous Great War, that would one day come.

Roughly speaking, angels are entrusted with three tasks.

Supporting the circulation of life of the people living in the human world in various ways is Raphael (angels of divine protection).

Caring for the “Tree of Life” that is the source of all life, Gabriel (angels of circulation).

And finally, fighting the demons that oppose Heaven, Michael (the army).

Within these three duties, one is given as a mission. For them, this “mission” is a duty, but also their “life.”

The archangel Kaito, also, left a glorious military record in the battle against demons, and for the sake of that destiny, continued to fight as one of Michael’s angels.

Everyone in the hierarchical system governed in Heaven under the strict laws, lived to fulfill the mission given to them. Kaito was no exception to this. Which was why right now, as part of his job as an archangel in charge of a combat unit, he was reluctantly attending this very dull archangel meeting from early in the morning until whenever it should end. Without hiding his lethargy from this stand-still discussion, Kaito looked out at the peaceful sunlight outside of the window. The reason he’d used earlier to try and escape from the meeting hadn’t been a lie. After the meeting, he had an appointment to meet his partner who had finally returned from the human world. While waiting for

him, she was probably comfortably and merrily taking an afternoon nap somewhere.

“In any case, there’s no mistake about the information I’ve required. What threatens the faith towards us, and is spreading darkness little by little among humans ... is the demon faith originating from the Velcant Region.”

He listened to what he heard beside him. Demon faith was something that was present all hours of the day and night all over the human world, but it had never been directly dealt with until now.

“Velcant, is it ... This is about needing me to go and directly investigate, I assume.”

The Velcant area was a land that the Seventh Unit that Kaito led had under their direct surveillance.

Even in the human world, it was a remarkably glamorous and advanced civilization, and also a region where the nobles and rulers were constantly engaged in a struggle for power.

“However, this time’s gathering seems to be a large-scale plan for them. It would be better if were to take all possible safety measures and create a detailed strategy ...”

“Interference is futile. Velcant is under my jurisdiction.”

Interrupting the angel that tried to disagree, Kaito stood up fully from his chair this time.

Pretentious speeches were pointless. All that mattered was presenting the “results” as he usually did.

With superior combat ability and charismatic leadership, Kaito led the strongest armed unit known as the Angels’ Seventh Holy Lance. In fact, the Seventh Unit that Kaito led, known for both their success and talent, consisted of only the very strongest, prided elites from the Heaven Army.

“It’s settled then, Archangel Kaito. You will be given full responsibility of investigating the demon faith in the Velcant Region, as well as subduing all the

demons. Everyone, there are no objections to this? However, do not do the impossible.”

With gentle smiles, the elderly archangels concluded the discussion.

The angels’ hierarchical system was strict. Lower-class angels must obey those higher up than them. Rather, the instinct to obey was engraved into their bodies. The greatness of the divine power in Heaven was the absolute guide to all.

The angel that was angry over Kaito taking the credit, clenched their fists in frustration, and glared at him as they spoke.

“Archangel Kaito, allow me to give you a piece of advice.”

Kaito, who had been quick to leave his seat, stopped walking and looked back at the owner of that voice.

“What is it, Luka?”

“You’re only riding on your success right now; this battle cannot be won with the strength of divine

power alone. It would be best that you take care not to be deceived by lowly humans.”

The captain of the Sixth Unit that was in charge of protecting of the Valul Region neighboring Velcant, named Luka, then left the room with her long, beautiful pink hair swaying behind her. Luka saw Kaito as a rival in every aspect. Because it was often that he took credit for her achievements, she used every opportunity she could to lash out at him. Being of the same archangel class, they were probably born around the same time, as well. Luka was an extremist, an angel affiliating with the Ira faction. They had a collective thinking of assuming humans as lower life forms made to imitate angels, and that angels “looked after” the humans in the world below. It was a thought that had spread ever since the Great War, in order to strengthen the leadership in Heaven, and their loyalty towards God.

Kaito himself, was also of the Ira faction, and therefore looked down on humans, but most likely not as much as she did. As the days went on, the



extremists and conservatives clashed in this way during every major conference. In this kind of state, if the demons' army were to invade, would things turn out well in the end? That was what every archangel secretly worried about.

Feeling a slight irritation, Kaito left the conference hall.

Flying east from the Conference Tower for about thirty minutes, the Griselle Garden came into view.

There were various kinds of vegetation overgrowing, and the water from the huge fountain in the center flowed to all corners of the garden. It gave the feeling of being embraced by the calm and cheerful mid-afternoon. In the branch of an apple tree growing beside the fountain lay Rin. She had assumed an afternoon nap, which she loved.

“If you sleep in such a place, you'll fall.”

Hearing a voice from above her, Rin got up with a start.

“Uwaah!”

Not being able to spread her wings in time, she seemed about to fall from the branch, but caught herself with her arm before that happened.

“Are you okay?”

“K-Kaito! Thanks, you saved me!”

“You ... Your way of speaking is the same as always.”

With drowsy eyes and a smile, Rin used her wings to sit back up on the branch.

“Eh ...? But Kaito is Kaito, right?”

“All the rest of the lower-ranking angels call me Archangel Kaito ... the only one that doesn’t is you.”

“Eh— But I was taught that you should address your partner with deep affection by doing away with formalities.”

“ ... ”

Normally, angels work in pairs. They are assigned

“partners” that are of a different rank than themselves. The higher-ranking angel acts as a mentor over the lower-ranking angel, while the lower-ranking angel respects the higher-ranking angel; this is an order that must be followed. In this way, where the rules of the hierarchical society in Heaven are applied, the foundation for the unwavering trust-based relationship amongst angels is formed ... This is what is taught to all angels, however ...

This cheerful and innocent girl, Rin, had little interest in these Heavenly laws. Her personality hadn't changed much from the time she was born, but even today, it was rare for there to be such a nonchalant and freewheeling angel.

Kaito suddenly recalled the sworn friend that had once imparted his knowledge to Rin as her partner —always a cheerful, easygoing young man with jade green eyes, and unconsciously broke into a smile.

“So, how did the archangel meeting go?”

Rin picked two ripe, delicious-looking apples from a tree branch, and asked this while eating both at once.

“The same as always. A waste of my time.”

Kaito answered while biting into his own apple, which Rin had handed to him.

Without being too sweet, it was the perfect ripeness. After chewing another huge mouthful, Rin swallowed loudly.

“Oh oh, the human world was pretty fun!”

Rin had gone to the human world for these two weeks for her training as an angel. And with that, she had been promoted from an angel trainee to a junior angel, and come back after finishing the last of her training.

“There was a lot of delicious food in the human world~ And weird clothes that I’d never seen before~ And also ...”

“I see ... From today onwards, you’re a junior angel,

are you?”

“Yep! I’m a fully-fledged ‘angel’ now!”

“A fully-fledged angel wouldn’t need to say something like that.”

“Ohh—Kaito, you meanie. Even though I gave you an apple—“

“... Why am I a— ... Anyway, you merely went and picked this apple without permission from this branch—“

“Ah—okay, okay, I got it already. Sheesh!”

Cutting off Kaito’s words, Rin pouted and turned away. In this situation, wouldn’t I be the one that should be offended? Kaito wondered.

“Ahem. In any case ... That is, congratulations on your promotion.”

“!”

When Rin hurriedly turned around, Kaito—who always made such fastidious expressions—was

smiling just slightly, as if embarrassed.

“Thank you, Kaito! I’ll be full of energy from today onwards!”

With an ear-to-ear grin, the girl that was smiling like an imp forgot her earlier bad mood and began preparing for work with gusto atop of the branch.

Whenever he was with Rin, impossible things happened. Things such as Kaito smiling, something that the other angels had probably never seen before. Being so serious, he was calm and collected towards all matters, and showed no interest in interactions with other angels. For such a cold person, this one girl who had become his partner about one thousand years ago had made a considerable influence on him.

As her superior, he had no doubts about her, and they came together as equals. For Kaito, who always kept a distance with the other angels, and lived faithfully solely for the sake of his mission, Rin was an existence that brought him peace and repose.

“Don’t become so full of energy that you fall from the tree *again*. I’ve never seen any other angel fall from one despite the fact that we have wings.”

As soon as he said this, he lightly spread his wings and soared into the air.

First, they would celebrate at the three o’clock tea, the promotion of his subordinate, who was following him from below while noisily spouting complaints.

## **Part 2: The White Angel**

Velcant Region, Kingdom of Alphine. Not a large country, it consisted of a series of islands floating in the middle of a huge lake. Due to the abundant fishery resources and mild climate, all the people enjoyed a rich life with the natural resources. Running through the center of the main island, called Rulen Island, was a massive bridge that connected the large countries to the east and to the west of Alphine. Bechstein Bridge, which served as a road for commerce between these counties, was approximately forty kilometers long, and two hundred meters across at its widest point. Many commercial establishments were lined up on top of the bridge.

Alphine served as a neutral point between Folle, to the east of the bridge, and Violente, to the west. During several points in history, it was caught in the destruction of the great wars between the east and west. However, as if by some miracle, a certain



charismatic statesman suddenly appeared, and due to his leadership, it became a wondrous country that escaped being dominated by either large country.

Perhaps because they had this historical background, statesmen began to be appointed periodically, and the citizens became faithful towards God. The long-standing continued independence and good political standing of Alphine was accredited to God's blessing, and over the generations, people continued to believe in Him more and more. As if to ascertain this, churches began to appear all over the country, each built to display the highest luxury. The first travelers to this country were fascinated by their breath-taking beauty.

The Kingdom of Alphine, along with the Kingdom of Folle to the east, and the Kingdom of Violente to the west, made up the Velcant Region, which the Seventh Unit, led by Kaito, was responsible for in Heaven.

The Velcant Region was a region in which the humans were constantly battling amongst each other, and was also once the site of the “Fall of Paradise” incident that took place during the Great War of Heaven.

The Paradise That Fell To The Earth—In Heaven, this was what Alphine was called. As the name suggested, the Kingdom of Alphine that was surrounded by a lake, was once Heaven’s Paradise. During the Great War of Heaven five hundred years prior, the force of the demons far exceeded the angels’ expectations, and the “Tree of Life” that was said to be the heart of Heaven, had been on the brink of being taken over.

If the Tree of Life had fallen into the hands of the demons, all life would be under their control, and it would have led to the collapse of both the existing worlds of Heaven and Earth. In order to protect the Tree of Life at that time, the Great Archangel decided that the regions the demons had penetrated would be dropped to the earth.

This became the Kingdom of Alphine. In the ancient texts written by the humans at that time, this was what was recorded.

“On a very bright and peaceful day, accompanied by a deafening roar, the sky fell to the earth. The birds fled from the sky to the ground, and vegetation withered away in an instant. As the sky gradually drew closer, all the townspeople became overcome with indescribable fear, waiting with bated breaths for the end to come. Once the sky had fallen to reach the top of the town’s big church, a myriad of white and black wings came twirling down from the sky, surrounding the townspeople, and engulfing everything in a flood of blinding light. As they struggled to remain conscious, the townspeople realized that they were suddenly standing in the middle of a beautiful land. Although everyone was puzzled over why they were all naked, they soon forgot this at the sight of the beautiful, lush flowers as far as the eyes could see, and beyond that, the wide ocean. All of it was like a paradise that they

had seen only in the land of dreams. And so here, we founded our new country.”

Originally, this region did not have a lake, and five hundred years ago, was only deep forests and a few small towns. But in one day, a beautiful island came to float in the center of the lake.

Due to the small population and underdeveloped civilization, those that knew the truth about this fallen paradise were few. As five hundred years passed, it became only an old fairytale.

When Alphine was dropped to the earth, because the invading demons had been taken down along with it, the holy power and dark power became mixed. Due to this impact, although the land was rich, it became a land of never-ending fighting. Ever since the Fall, whether it was between the angels and demons, or wars the humans fought amongst themselves, this land was the main battlefield.

Being positioned between two large warring countries to the east and west, and affected by the

wars on several occasions, the fact that it remained a rich and independent country was truly due to God's blessing. The country was original Heaven's Paradise that "fell to the earth." It was protected by the angels, against all odds, from the sidelines.

Because of this, the well-being of this land was entrusted to only powerful, capable angels from Heaven. Since a hundred years prior, Kaito had been left this responsibility.

Here, the internal factional wars between those with power continued to go on, and complex power relations with the affected east and west countries had been established. The job of Kaito's unit was to investigate the lives of the humans, and if necessary, to intervene.

—

The season was soon to be early summer. Avoiding the blinding rays of sunlight, Rin, who was resting her wings in the shade of a tree, breathed softly while listening to the sounds of bells from a far away

church. After being promoted from an “angel trainee” to a “junior angel,” Rin had come to investigate the rumor of the “demon faith” that had infiltrated the churches in Alphine. Demon faith in itself was not something so uncommon; demons had always tempted humans with weak hearts, using the brainwashing technique known as “Honest” to fuel the power for the demons. Usually, the mission would be to gather information, find a likely hiding place, and then engage in battle with several demons. However, it seemed that the situation this time would be different than the norm.

Typically, demons’ Honest attached to humans with simple, weak hearts, amplifying their emotions and corrupting them, thus gaining the demons “dark power.” However, for some reason, this time, the demons were only targeting devout humans with strong hearts. Humans with strong hearts had strong wills, or to be exact, high life energy, and were much more difficult to corrupt. Why would they be purposely choosing “devout humans with

strong hearts” when they were so hard to control? This was something that needed to be investigated, which led to this task of simple surveillance being entrusted to Rin.

“Ah~h, I’m so bored.”

The captain of the Seventh Unit, Kaito, had gone to assist in a sudden battle that had broken out with the demons, leaving Rin to investigate alone. Rin had been enthusiastic about her first missions since being promoted. However, after a month passed without being able to grasp even the tail of any leads, all of her motivation completely disappeared.

It was boring ... but not simply because of her lack of progress. Even as an apprentice angel, she had always held a passion for her duties as an angel, and been a hard-working person. She’d had numerous past experiences with reconnaissance missions, as well, and like now, there had been times where she hadn’t been able to bring about any results.

“Why is it so boring this time ... Even though I

always work so hard, no matter what it is ... Kaito, and even that person before him, would praise me for being so diligent- ... Ah!”

As she thought about it, Rin finally realized the cause for her lack of motivation.

“I get it. It’s because I’m alone this time ...”

For all the missions until now, she had always had a partner with her. Angels usually worked together as a pair, and it was rare that they would receive a mission alone. Up until now, the reason that work had been enjoyable was probably because she had a partner beside her. Rin felt very lonely by herself right now, and when she was alone, it was hard to understand the enjoyable things and the difficult things.

“I wonder when Kaito will come back~ It’s boring to be on my own.”

Just as she decided to sleep off her boredom until the humans would start moving for the time of prayer, she suddenly heard screams coming from the inside



of the nearby church.

“...! Did a demon come!?”

Getting up in a hurry, she flew up to the stained glass windows of the church she had been keeping watch over. Once she looked to see how the state of things were inside, she saw that humans were killing each other with weapons.

“Ehh!? Wh-what is this!? Is this the work of a demon ...? But I don’t sense any signs of darkness from them ...”

It seemed that the humans were fighting each other with killing intent. Humans that were brainwashed by demons had dull eyes, loss of reason, and disoriented movements, but the humans that were killing each other right now were clearly different from that. If this wasn’t the influence of demons, then she had no jurisdiction to interfere. A junior angel was not allowed to directly tamper with deaths caused amongst humans. The law was absolute—severe punishment awaited those who

broke it.

Frustrated that she could do nothing to stop the slaughter unfolding before her eyes, Rin clenched her fists and made to quietly leave this place.

*Bang—*

A gunshot. Sharp pain erupted in her left wing, and fresh blood spewed out.

Clutching the wing that had been shot, she looked behind her and saw a youth with long, red hair, beating his large, jet-black wings and carrying a black gun.

A demon—

She quickly pulled out her own white gun and pulled the trigger. Overhead the humans who were fighting amongst themselves, Rin and the demon had a violent shootout in the air.

He was strong. The demon was fending off Rin's bullets at just the right timings, and as if dancing in the air, left few openings with his light and fluid

movements.

The foe was firing as well, but it was most likely a feint. If he was able to leave so little openings, it was safe to say that he had confidence even in a bare-handed fight.

If this turned into close combat, the odds would be against her.

With one attack from the demon, the stained glass windows cracked with a loud sound. Rin quickly flew from the roof and pulled the trigger. The bullets they exchanged hit the walls and ceiling of the church, causing parts of it to collapse.

“Look out!”

Below the crumbling roof were the frenzied, fighting humans. Using all the strength in her in a split-second decision, she aimed a bullet at the falling rumble.

Within a hair’s breadth, it hit its mark and shattered the debris into small pieces. However, the humans

continued to rampage without taking notice. At this rate, she wouldn't be able to gather the evidence for the investigation, and even the brainwashed humans would be lost.

“Ugh ...!”

The fight resumed again. Since being distracted by the humans below, it became even harder to land a hit. This demon wasted not a single minute in his movements. To be more accurate, he was specifically targeting Rin's wings. An angel's weakness—every time their wings, which were stored with holy power, were touched by a demon's dark power, they would deteriorate.

While protecting her battered left wing, she desperately aimed for the demon's vital point.

Yes, this was it!

With all of her strength put into this one attack, she struck the demon's heart with spectacular accuracy—At least, that had been her intention.

“You’re pretty good. But, too bad.”

In the next moment, both of Rin’s hands and wings were restrained from behind her; she had been caught by the demon.

“...! But I was so sure that I’d hit you ... How!?”

Flailing with her restrained arms and wings, she desperately struggled.

“What you hit was an illusion that I created. Didn’t you notice?”

“!”

As if ridiculing her, the demon laughed boldly, and in a terribly charming voice, whispered dangerously.

“I’m fine with killing you here and now ... But there’s one thing I want to ask. If you behave and answer me, I’ll let you escape. That oh-so-precious tree you’re all protecting—Where is it? It’s been moved since the battle five hundred years ago, right?”

“... I won’t give in to a demon like you!”

“Oh~ ... Feisty, aren’t you? I like girls like that.”

Smiling cheerfully, the demon tightened his grip.

“Ah ...”

Strong ... The level of this demon was clearly different from those she had encountered so far.

She couldn’t win ...

“If you don’t tell me soon, your precious wing will be torn off, you know?”

“I’ll never tell you!”

“Huh. Well, then ...”

“! Ahhhhhh!”

The demon mercilessly gouged the wound in her left wing. As dark power entered directly into her body, Rin writhed in agony at the pain that washed over her—the most intense she had ever felt.

“You’re rather stubborn~ I hadn’t planned on killing you, but I guess it can’t be helped ... Hm? Oh, and

what's this ...?"

Just as she felt her consciousness slipping from the dark energy flowing into her, the demon suddenly released his grip on her. Losing that support, she began to fall, but the demon lightly caught her in his arms.

"Wh-why!?"

"... Don't you wonder~ ... Well, there are a lot of whimsical ones among demons."

The demon was staring at Rin's face with a pensive expression. Glancing from her pretty blonde hair, to the earring on her right ear, he stared intently as if confirming something— And then, with a graceful flap of his wings, he lay Rin down underneath a tree in the garden.

"... If it's here, the humans being controlled with Honest won't be able to find you, so you'll be able to rest a bit ... Well, even though I say that, they may not be able to even see you~"

The demon that she had just been fighting with suddenly stopped trying to kill her, and as if concerned with her wounds, even went as far as carrying her to a safe place. Being much too surprised, Rin couldn't speak at all, and simply listened.

“You seem really surprised. ... Not without reason, I suppose. After all, you angels are almost idiotically blind with your faith.”

“Sh-shut ... up! ... Why ... are you helping me? I'm your enemy, aren't I!?”

“Yes, that's right, we're enemies. But I don't feel like fighting with you anymore. ... It feels like I might remember some stupid thing from the past, so I'm going now. See ya.”

“Ah! Wait- ... It hurts ...”

Saying this, the demon spread his large, black wings and flew off.

“Why ...”



Somehow resounding with the scene from that day, her chest began to hurt. While staring in the direction the demon had flown off in, she tried to figure out his mysterious actions, but couldn't. Why? She couldn't understand the words that he had said at all. And, there was some kind of haze in her heart ... as if warning her that it was dangerous to think about this.

*“Yes, that’s right, we’re enemies. But I don’t feel like fighting with you anymore—”*

They were enemies, but he didn't want to fight—

To understand those words correctly— ...Words had double meanings; she was scared to think about what he was feeling.

Without being able to finish her thoughts, Rin lost consciousness.

## Part 3: Meeting

How much time had passed?

The day had completely darkened, and the town in Alphine was dyed in the beautiful colors of the sunset. For a while, she merely sat fascinated by the beauty around her, but soon forced herself to stand up.

“I have to get back ...”

Protecting her left wing that had been injured in the fight with the demon, Rin staggered through the twilight town. Injuring her wing had been a grave mistake. Although she was somehow able to withstand the pain, she was unable to fly with nearly half of her wing gone. Not to mention, most of her holy power had been used up.

Because Heaven resided in a different special plane that the human world, it couldn't be reached without holy power. Even if one were to fly blindly, without holy power, you would only continue to fly

through the endless sky. Either way, until both her wings and holy power were restored, she would have to remain in this world.

Baffled, she walked though the town alone. Humans were not able to see angels, so no one would be able to notice her injured form. Swaying unsteadily, she blended in with the crowds of humans and passed through the bustle of activity. Perhaps because they were making preparations for dinner, a pleasant smell drifted in the air. Reaching the low hill at the end of the main road, she saw the country's largest cathedral.

“If it's there, then there should be enough holy power, so I'll stay there for the time being.”

Because it had once fallen from Heaven, it was therefore the town that had fallen from the sky.

In the center of the town was the remarkably gorgeous Claude Cathedral. For the devout people of this town, the cathedral was enshrined as the place closest to Heaven. Furthermore, the faith of the

people that visited this cathedral gave off the highest quality of holy energy. For this reason, it was often been used as a resting place.

She slowly ascended the spiral staircase going around the hill.

For angels that usually flew with their wings to get around and seldom walked on two legs, this staircase was a slight challenge. In Heaven, after becoming a fully-fledged angel, there are various tests and obligatory training, but the most important for when staying in the human world was using their legs in “bipedal training.”

Particularly for angels that were assigned to the Alphine region, and would need to stay in the human for extensive periods of time, the training of going up and down the spiral stairs at this Claude Cathedral was made mandatory. When Rin had been doing long-term training to be promoted to a junior angel, she had repeated the training of going up and down these stairs with Gumi.

That was the first time that she thought humans were amazing.

Ever since the Great War, there was a long period of time where there was a school of thought known as Neo-Angels, that believed strongly in only training the power of their wings. The majority of angels sided with this faction. Walking on two legs was seen as inferior, savage and uncivilized behavior, and became banned. However, times changed. In recent years, it was proved that training the whole body gave an advantage in combat against demons, and walking and running power became factors in the evaluation of a strong angel. There was even a suggestion that “walking” be included as one of the official competitive events in the “St. Sports Festival” held every four years.

However, regardless of how skilled angels were recently at walking, climbing stairs while injured was an enormous strain on the body. As soon as Rin reached the top, she collapsed, her body falling forward.

“Haa ... haa ... My wings ... hurt ...”

Lying on her side, she looked down at the scenery. A small whirlwind was blowing. About two to three parts of her wing was missing. The town that had dyed in red until just a while ago had dimmed, and the sun seemed just about to set.

“So pretty ...”

Someone spoke.

Looking down from here right now, the town certainly was beautiful.

Rin also liked that sad moment of waiting as the last lamplight that illuminates the world fleetingly disappeared.

“But, it’s even prettier to see it from Heaven. It looks like scarlet paint was spilled from above.”

She muttered this, as if responding to the voice.

“I see ... I’d like to see that.”

Riding on a wind, the beautiful and melodious voice

answered again.

“... Eh!?”

With a momentary delay, she turned to see the owner of the voice.

Her breath was taken away.

There stood a girl dressed in black clothing.

Beautiful hair and eyes the color of verdure.

Speechless, she was captivated by her clear eyes that seemed to draw you in.

*Beautiful*, she thought.

“Are ... you injured?”

The black-clad girl asked this with a concerned expression.

“Ah ... u-um ... M-me ...? Why!?”

For the moment, she was flustered and unable to react, and merely asked again.

This was the human world. Because she was an angel, this girl should not be able to hear her voice.

She didn't have wings, and seemed to be a human no matter how she looked at her. Could it be that she was having a dream?

"Your wing is injured, isn't it? It seems painful."

After saying this, she crouched in front of Rin, narrowed her large eyes and looked at her injured wing with sympathy.

"Miss Angel isn't able to return to Heaven like this ... That's so sad."

Being an angel, she was surprised that the girl could see her form, but she also wondered how she was able to guess so quickly about being unable to go back. Her surprise filled her eyes, and remaining speechless, she merely stared at the beautiful face of the girl in front of her. Although even her superior, Kaito, often told her that her emotions were always written all over her face, it was their first time meeting ... Furthermore, for a human girl to be able to detect her so easily was both shocking and embarrassing. Although angels appeared to be based



on humans, and most seemed rather young, it had already been well over a hundred and fifty years since she had been born as an angel.

Despite the fact that Rin seemed taken aback, the girl said this.

“Miss Angel ... if you’d like, would you come to my house?”

“... Ehh!? Ah, b-but ...”

“Since you seem troubled about not being able to go home ... Ah, but I’m not just inviting you for no reason. You’re injured, and ... you don’t look like you’re able to fly with those wings.”

“Uuu ...”

Her house. A human’s ... house. She wondered how humans lived. To tell the truth, she had always been curious about humans. However, other than what was necessary, the laws of Heaven prohibit any further relations with humans. For example, when the senior angels intervene in the human world for

some reason, or when contacting a priest, or some member of the clergy that possessed special power. Junior angels have no reason that warranted contact with a human. In the first place, there aren't many humans that are able to see angels. Why is this girl able to see my form ...? Although she was young, could she possibly have a special position in the clergy?

She speculated all of these in her thoughts at once.

“Is it ... impossible, after all? For an angel and a human to get along?”

While Rin was silent, the girl muttered this sadly.

“That's not true!!”

She shouted in a loud voice suddenly. The girl looked surprised. Rin was bewildered at the words that had come out unconsciously, and could only panic.

“Ah— ... Um. ... I'm, Rin. I'm an angel, but I haven't been the human world all that much yet. You can

see angels, right? That caught me off guard.”

“... Hehe.”

All of a sudden, the girl let out a funny laugh.

“Ehh!? D-Did I say something weird ...? This is my first time talking to a human, so ...”

“No, not at all. I just thought, since you weren’t answering at all, that Miss Angel wasn’t allowed to talk to humans. That’s why when you suddenly spoke, I was ... really happy.”

Happy—

The moment she saw the girl smile like flowers blooming, she heard something.

Was this ... the sound of bells?

The shrill sounds of bells were ringing inside her head, and she felt almost as if it were the beginning of a new world.

Was this ... what a human was like? Or was this ...

“My name is Miku. This is also my first time

meeting an angel. When I first saw you, I was a little scared, but once I came closer, you were really so pretty ... I ended up saying that out loud without thinking. And that was when you thought I meant the sunset.”

She couldn't take her eyes off her giggling face. Miku's crystal clear voice was like birdsong, and even more beautiful than the song of the birds of paradise that lived in Heaven. She wanted to stay like this, and look at her forever. She wanted to listen to this voice.

To this human's ... No, to her voice.

“Um, about what you asked earlier ... If it's not any trouble, would you allow me to stay at your house, just for a little while ...?”

Under Heaven's laws, she would probably receive some kind of punishment. No matter what grave injury prevented one from returning, to find shelter at a human dwelling was unusual behavior for an angel.

Even so, she wanted to be together with this beautiful girl, for just a little longer.

“Really!? I’m so happy ...! Of course, you’re very welcome! Let’s get along well ... Rin.”

“Yes, let’s get along well, umm ... Miku.”

She took hold of Miku’s extended hand and stood up. The moment she touched her slender hand, she felt an unbearable sad feeling. Her soul shook.

Was she feeling sentimental because of the sunset? Although it was her first time having this emotion, it somehow felt familiar. She could hear the sound of bells signaling that it would soon become night.

Without understand the meaning of this sadness, she descended the spiral staircase with her, following the sinking sunset.

# Chapter 2

## Part 1: The Girl in Black

Kingdom of Alphine, Rulen Island. In a place not far from the Claude Cathedral located at the island's center, was the Cyrinpt Mansion. Built four hundred years ago by the prodigious architect, Tossano, this mansion combined the structural mechanics of planes and isometrics in a sensible balance, known as the prominent style of "Neo Tossano Architecture." It was carefully decorated down to the last detail, and although an old building, it was reinforced with repairs over the years to remain in good condition. This mansion had a history of being inherited by each new family head of House of Cyrinpt over many generations. In particular, the garden that was made through careful arrangement and calculations was a sight to behold, and naturally, received high praises from the nobles of

neighboring countries. Every month, the nobles and aristocrats gathered in this garden for social parties. The Cyrinpt House was a prestigious family that has been around since the founding of Alphine, and Miku was the daughter of their current family head. It was a peaceful afternoon. Having come back from church, Miku was enjoying an early afternoon tea in the Cyrinpt Mansion's prized garden.

“Miku! Miku~!”

While drinking Earl Grey, and reading the book she had purchased that morning, she suddenly heard the desperately shouting voice of a girl approaching.

“Miku~! Ah, there you are!”

“... Why are you in such a hurry, Rin? ... Oh ...! Fufu ...”

Miku couldn't help but giggle slightly when she saw Rin's appearance.

“Miku, you're so mean~! Hmph ...!”

Rin puffed out her cheeks and faced the other

direction. She seemed to be upset about being laughed at.

“It suits you very well. You look like a cute princess.”

“~~~!”

A princess. Just as Miku said, right now, Rin looked like a princess. On her head was a tiara inlaid with diamonds and pearls, and she wore a pale pink dress that looked almost like flower petals sewn together. She had on a light, neat makeup, and her beautiful blonde hair was set in curls. She had the appearance of an adorable princess that had just come out of a fairy tale.

“Lady Rin~~! Where have you gone~? Your makeup isn’t finished yet~~!”

A voice could be heard calling for Rin from the mansion. It was the mansion’s tailor maid, Lily. She was the one solely in charge of “dressing people up.” The princess-like appearance that Rin had now was also something that she had tailored. Gradually,



Lily's voice began to come closer.

At this rate, she would be found ...

Rin dove under the table that Miku was sitting at to hide there. There was just enough space for one person to fit comfortably.

“You certainly are making a lot of noise ... What's wrong?”

“Ah, Lady Miku! Did Lady Rin pass through here ...? We were still in the middle of ‘producing,’ and she suddenly disappeared ...”

“That seems like fun, Lily. ... Hmm, well, we were having tea together a moment ago ... But it seems she's already gone back inside the mansion.”

“Has she now ...! Thank you very much! Lady Riiin~~!”

With blue eyes shining with determination, the maid named Lily ran back in the direction of the mansion.

“... Is she gone?”

Lifting the tablecloth up, Rin very slowly checked the surroundings, wearing a worried expression on her face. She seemed to be quite overwhelmed by Lily's "production."

"Yes. But it might be a good idea to stay out here for the time-being."

Rin remembered the ridiculously happy look on Lily's face earlier, and chuckling, her own expression relaxed slightly.

"Sheesh~~ I wish she'd give me a bit of a break ... This is already the second outfit today."

Lily was a tailor. In other words, her job was to dress up the people that lived in this mansion. With a natural, exceptional sense for aesthetics and technique, she was boasted as being the best in the kingdom. Her only fault, however, was being much too hard-working. Particularly when she found high-quality "material," her tailoring craftsmanship would be fired up, and she would not stop until her product was finished to her liking. Currently, after

coming across the highest quality material the other day, she was completely engrossed in producing Rin.

Today's theme was the Princess Series. After changing into the second outfit in the morning, Rin had become thoroughly worn out. In the middle of applying the makeup, Lily had gone off to find more mascara, and Rin had taken the chance to escape. Ever since the night Rin had taken shelter in the mansion, Lily's enthusiastic "production" had continued, and she soon grew used to life at the Cyrinpt Mansion. According to Lily, Rin was a "diamond gemstone." If polished, the beautiful shine of her hidden alluring light would be released ... Or so she said.

Normal humans cannot see angels, or feel their presence. Usually, angels will hide their form and voice from humans. In truth, every angel is able to reveal their form at will, but everyone follows the law in Heaven that prohibited unnecessary contact with humans. If her wings were not damaged, and she wasn't lacking in holy power, Rin was also able

to hide her appearance. However, as long Rin was staying at Miku's mansion, there would be various inconveniences if she was to stay unseen, and they decided that she should make herself visible.

While she was in the mansion, Rin posed as a freewheeling noble lady that had come from the neighboring Kingdom of Folle. While in Alphine, she had suddenly met Miku and gotten along right away, and for the sake of deepening their friendship, they were currently staying together. That was the story they had made up. The reason they had said she was freewheeling, was a camouflage for not having any practices or education like other nobles. Rin, of course, looked just like humans did, wore human clothes, and hid her wings so that she would not be suspected to be an angel.

“Since coming here, my wounds have mostly healed, though~ But it's tough being dressed up like a doll every day.”

“Really? I, for one, have a lot of fun seeing Rin in

different outfits.”

“I’m an angel, so there isn’t much point to dressing up so much.”

“Oh ... But I think Rin’s pure white outfit to look very fashionable and lovely.”

“Eh ...! I-I guess so ...”

Although Rin had little interest in her outer appearance, she actually felt happy to be complimented like this by Miku. To hide her embarrassment, she started fiddling with her bangs.

“Rin really is so cute.”

“Ehhh~~! That’s not true ...!”

“... ? Do you dislike being called cute, Rin ...? Even though that dress looks so nice on you.”

“It’s ... not that I dislike it, but ...”

As soon as she had asked that, Rin began to trail off. Had she touched on a sensitive topic, perhaps? Speaking of which ...

“Rin, you talk in a masculine manner, don’t you? Although you look like a girl, could it be that ... You’re actually a boy?”

Rin, who had sat down in the adjacent chair, suddenly spit out the Earl Grey she was drinking.

“Oh, dear! Are you alright?”

When Rin started coughing, Miku kindly rubbed her back for her. She thought it a just little out of place that an angel would spit out tea.

“Haa, haa ... *Miku* ... Sometimes I don’t know whether you’re joking or being serious.”

“I don’t joke very much at all.”

“... I see ... Well, either way. We, angels, don’t have a clear gender like humans do. Well, when it comes to appearance, we choose to look either male or female, like humans do. But I shouldn’t appear to be a male in any way.”

“I see ... So, Rin’s a girl, after all?”

“Hmmm ... I guess I am. ... But, what’s more

important than appearance, is the qualities of the soul ...”

Still trying to think of how to properly explain everything, Rin held a scone in each hand. They were self-baked by Miku for teatime. Today, she had made them especially delicious, and was thinking about giving some to her mother when she came home. She was very confident this time ... So surely, her mother would be happy about them, as well ...

She felt a small ache in her chest.

“So, Rin, how are today’s snacks ...? I put in raspberries that I picked fresh from the garden this morning.”

Every day, Miku would make snacks for teatime. She was quite skilled at it, and would even be praised by the mansion’s chef.

“They’re so good!!”

With her mouth full of raspberry scone, Rin smiled with a carefree smile. When she saw that bright

smile, her slightly anxiety from earlier was blown away. Rin had a mysterious quality about her. Not because she was an angel, but because her bright smile, that seemed to shine on her surroundings like the sun, would fill you with happiness, as well. The worries and sadness in your heart would be dispelled, as if your “soul” were being healed. Miku wasn’t very sure on how to explain it exactly with just words.

“Oh, Rin ... It’s inappropriate behavior for a ‘princess’ to be holding scones in both hands, and talking with her mouth full.”

Miku said this to tease her, and sure enough, Rin shouted in reply, “But I’m not a princess~~!” and just as expected, began to choke again on the scones that got stuck in her throat.

Somehow, it felt like she’d found a cute younger sister. Or perhaps, even a younger brother.

Tomorrow, she would bake the apple pie that Rin loved, as angels loved apples. When she had made



an apple pie the other way, Rin's eyes had sparkled so brightly, and she had eaten the entire thing by herself in less than four minutes. It all felt nostalgic in some way, and Miku found herself smiling naturally. She remembered, a long time ago, her mother had once baked an apple pie for her father, and he had been so happy while eating it.

Looking up at the sky, she saw dark, grey clouds in the distance. It looked like it was about to rain.

\*

From atop of the bridge that seemed to stretch on endlessly, the crowds of people below could be observed. It was if all the people in the world had been gathered together here.

Between Folle, to the east, and Violente, to the west, there was the Kingdom of Alphine, made prosperous by various forms of commerce. The large marketplace, known as "Glosse Market" was held by the kingdom once a year. Today, as well, many merchants from the east and west had crossed the

Belchstein Bridge to come to the Glosse Market. This marketplace, which could even be called a Festival for Merchants, was a place to display a variety of goods from their respective countries, and trade with each other. Both merchants and noblemen participated in this event.

People had come to promote their goods to well-known nobles, or to observe or buy-out their competitors, or even to mediate business relations. During the one week period that the Glosse Market was held, Alphine's economy was multiplied by thirty times of what it usually was.

Looking down at the lively humans in their festive mood, Rin yawned loudly. Today, she had taken a form that was invisible to them, and was floating far up in the sky. While waiting for her friend to finish buying from the shoemaker, Rin was observing humans. It was her first time visiting this world in a while, and because it was the one festival day of the year, it was rather crowded.

It had been one month since she had gotten injured and taken shelter at Miku's mansion. While living amongst the humans in their world, her wing had made a full recovery. During this time in Heaven, Kaito and the other angels had actually been in an uproar at first. Everyone was worried about Rin, who had not returned, and although they had abandoned their duties and put out a search, because Rin had lost most of her holy power and was living amongst humans, the other angels had not been able to locate her.

Angels normally use the holy energy in their bodies as a way of communication with each other. Therefore, should their holy energy be depleted, they are not be able to do so. In this case, Rin had daringly cut off contact with Heaven, therefore, no matter how hard they searched, they had not been able to pinpoint her exact location.

In addition, all angels have no sense of direction, with no exceptions. Angels recognize things by interpreting the flow of energy or holy power; that is

to say, they rely heavily on their six senses. Because of this, their spatial recognition ability is low, and due to having no interest in the terrain and streets of the human world, they do not bother to learn them. This is the reason why, to prevent becoming lost in the human world during missions, it became fundamental for two angels to work together as a pair.

Speaking of which, the hymns sung at churches are sung with holy power for the sake of empowering angels that become lost in the human world, so that they may call for help; this was started by a human that had, by chance, heard a song be used for this purpose.

Once her wings had healed, Rin had been able to fly back to Heaven. She told her direct superior, and partner, Kaito, about how she had expected the injury suffered from the battle with the demon would take time to heal, and because there was a risk that a demon would appear near the church again, she had taken shelter in Miku's mansion,

whom she had happened to meet by chance nearby.

Kaito had lectured his subordinate endlessly for a full week about being missing for a month, and after she had written many letters of apology and reflection statements for breaking the law, he had, somehow or other, come to understand.

Due to Kaito's exceptional ability to understand and the trust he had built in her—in other words, his angelicness, the matter had passed without being severely punished for breaking the law of “contacting a human directly as a junior angel”.

Under normal circumstances, this violation would have led to a demotion from junior angel to a trainee angel, but instead, she had been punished with cleaning the Grandios Temple (the largest building in Heaven) for three months.

Perhaps because she was in good favor of her superior since long before, she was never very strongly reprimanded for a little recklessness. She deeply regretted engaging in contact with a human

without permission and had shown remorse for her actions. However, after some time had passed, as expected, her adventurous nature won over, and she returned to continuing relations with humans. Her superior, Kaito, had a very strict personality towards himself and his surroundings, but for some reason, he only softened up with Rin. Even when she went to see Miku and Lily between jobs, although he was still cautious, for the most part, he would turn a blind eye.

Even today, when Rin was openly breaking the law and being in direct contact with humans again, he might be pretending not to notice right now.

“Anyway, there sure are a lot of people ...”

This bridge was always crowded with people whenever she came, but today in particular, it was so crowded that there didn't seem to be any room to walk.

Rin had a day off from work today, and had energetically come to the human world at sunrise.

Her purpose, naturally, was to see Miku. Ever since she'd injured her wing in the battle with the demon and stayed with her while it healed, she and Miku got along very well. When they'd first met, there were quite many bewildering things about human values and their living environment, but after spending time with Miku, Lily, and everyone at the Cyrinpt Mansion, she was able to grasp the general idea of what a "human" was like. For the most part, she's never met many humans before, so living with Miku and everyone had brought surprises every day, and new, fun experiences.

There was quite a gap of difference between what they were taught in Heaven about humans and what humans were actually like, so she thought that perhaps a training course involving contact with actual humans should be included in the promotion program.

To angels, humans were inferior beings. A weak existence. This was why angels were given the mission of overlooking their fragile lifespan. Up

until now, she had always believed this, and never doubted this concept. But now, she couldn't help but feel that there was something a little wrong about it. Surely, this was because she had met Miku. Although she should be a fragile, and inferior existence, every one of Miku's words made her heart waver. Once you get to know them, humans were very interesting, thought Rin. She wanted to know more and more about humans.

After finishing her shopping at the shoemakers, Miku looked up to see where Rin was in the sky, and jogged over to her. Today, Rin was accompanying Miku with her shopping.

"I'm sorry I'm late ..."

"Are you finished with buying everything?"

Rin lowered herself to Miku's line of sight as she came running up, and revealed herself, hiding her wings. In this way, she would make herself invisible whenever she wasn't with Miku, to avoid "recklessly being around humans" as much as



possible.

“Yes, quite. The Glosse Market is very crowded this year, and so much fun.”

Miku had brought Rin along, wanting to share the experience of this festival, which happened just once a year. It was especially exciting to see the various items brought to the marketplace on this huge Belchstein Bridge, most of which were rare goods you wouldn't normally be able to find. Today's highlight was a traditional, handcrafted item a merchant from a foreign country in the far east had brought, a piece of clothing with an original design, called a kimino. Miku had chosen several different ones to buy as souvenirs for Lily. From clothes to miscellaneous goods, perhaps she had bought just a little too much, as both of her arms were laden with bags.

In a split second, Rin took all of her bags from her.

“Now then, let's get going,” She said and started walking, with Miku one step behind her.

“Um, Rin! It’s alright, I’ll carry them.”

“Eh?”

“The bags ... You don’t have to carry all of them. I’ll carry some, as well!”

“Ahh, these ...? It’s not much, so it’s fine. They’re not heavy at all.”

Seeming not to mind at all, Rin swung both of her arms easily, despite carrying so many bags.

“...! R-really? But, I thought they were rather heavy ...”

Miku herself, even, thought that she might have bought too much, and tried to take some of the bags from Rin, who had walked ahead, but she wouldn’t allow her to.

“It’s fine, really. More importantly, let’s hurry and go back. I want to eat Miku’s homemade apple pie~”

Rin continued walking with a light step while whistling. Contrary to her appearance, she was rather strong and muscular. Just the other day,

when she had been helping Miku remodel her room, Rin had single-handedly moved all the furniture, and very quickly.

From an angel's point of view, it could simply be said that humans lacked in strength, but when Rin helped out with physical labor like this, Miku always praised her physical strength in an exaggerated manner. The look Miku gave her, which was both grateful and envious, tickled her a bit, and was also very comforting.

After walking for a little while, the bridge's Rest Square came into view. Usually, it was a relaxing place used for resting, with a fountain in the center and benches, but during the festival, it was bustling with the many stalls and crowds of people. Deciding to take a short break, they stopped walking, and in one corner of the square, there was a place that stood out with how it seemed almost conspicuously crowded. All around it, there were two to three times as many crowds as anywhere else.

“What’s going on ...?”

“Who knows ... Shall we go take a look?”

Pushing past the continuous flow of people to move closer, what they saw was a huge shooting range stall. At first glance, it appeared to be just an original shooting range stall, but upon closer inspection, all of the prizes were gorgeous, breath-taking decorations with rare designs. For one round, there was the usual amount of ten targets, but all the customers were captivated by the splendor of the aligned prizes, and playing all at once. However, not one person had been yet able to hit a single target.

It wasn’t surprising, as the rules for the game were fairly difficult. For one round, the challenger was given ten rounds of ammunition, one for each target. In this huge shooting range, there was a large distance to the targets, and furthermore, the targets were small. It would be exceptionally difficult, even for a gun master. And what was more, it was very costly just for one play, so it wasn’t something that

you could try numerous times. In short, it was a “get-rich-quick”-type of set-up.

While watching several people take the challenge, she glanced at the line of prizes. Although there was still much she didn't understand about human culture, they were certainly all very eye-catching. Nodding as she looked on, Rin then noticed that Miku had her eyes fixed on a single point for some time now. When Rin followed her gaze, she saw a ring with a flower motif. The beautiful, white flower petals looked like they were in the midst of blooming, as if they were the real thing.

“Miku, do you want that?”

Unable to pull her eyes away from the ring, Miku seemed a bit unfocused when she answered.

“Eh? Ah, yes ... It's very pretty ...”

Miku's gestures and behavior were fairly mature, but age-wise, she was still a teenage girl, and in terms of trends and fashions, she loved cute things. Looking around once, there were many other

women that were staring intently at that ring, just like Miku was.

“Hmm ...”

Without showing much interest in the ring, Rin pulled out some human paper bills from her pocket. During her stay with Miku, she’d studied a bit about the monetary value currency in the human world, but she still didn’t understand it very well. For some reason, these paper bills seemed to have more value than gold or silver coins.

“Hey, how many times do I get with this?”

Rin asked, holding up a bill with many zero’s written on it for the stall keeper to see.

“ey there! Li’l Miss, are y’gonna have a go?”

“Yeah. Is this enough?”

“Hmm! Yeah, ‘nuff for one round.”

As he said this, the smiling stall keeper took the money, and passed her the gun for shooting the targets.

“Here ya go. It’s a wee bit heavy, so be careful~ ‘though it’s a toy for playin’, if you do hit someone by mistake, they could get hurt. You get one practice shot, and ten for the real deal. Altogether, tha’s ten shots~ The li’l miss is ‘specially cute, so I’ll give ya one extra shot as a service.”

“It’s fine. I’ll just have ten like everyone else.”

“Oh, but with those delicate arms of yours ...”

*Bang!*

Silencing the stall keeper’s voice, the sound of the toy gun rang out and echoed around the square. The bullet that Rin shot hit the target dead center. At the sudden hit, all the people gathered there began to stir slightly.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! — ...*

Two shots, three, four ... Without wavering, all the toy bullets that were fired were drawn to the exact center of the targets.

“Ten.”

She hit the last target. Just few seconds before, none of them had a single scratch, but now, all ten targets had been hit with bullets right in the center, and were deeply gouged. All the surrounding onlookers were so stunned by this miraculous act, they had forgotten how to blink. Everyone had their mouths hanging open, frozen on the spot without saying a single word.

“... Um, I finished.”

Turning around like it was nothing, the stall keeper was frozen with the same smile he had on earlier.

“Heeeey!”

Perhaps because he was incredibly shocked, he didn't react even with Rin waved her arm in front of his face.

“Rin! That was *amazing*~!!”

Breaking the silence of the audience, Miku rushed up to Rin and threw her arms around her. Stunned by the sudden embrace, Rin's cheeks reddened. It



made her panic so much that she'd forgotten about how composed she'd been firing the gun earlier.

“Um, Miku ...!”

“Amazing! You're amazing, Rin!!”

As Miku blushed and looked at Rin with a sparkling and respectful gaze, Rin tried to suppress her throbbing heartbeat, and cast a sideways glance at the prizes. According to the rules, since she'd hit all ten targets, she should be able to receive any prize that she liked.

“Could I have that one?”

She asked the stall keeper, pointing at the beautiful ring with the flower motif that all the women, Miku included, had been staring at with glittering eyes. All around, there were already loud shouts of praise and cheers for Rin.

“... Yeah, s-sure ... That was quite a sight, Li'l Miss.”

The stall keeper finally returned to his senses, and although still in a daze, he began to pack up the ring

that was the most remarkable of all the prizes. He was surprised about seeing the first prize winner from Glosse Market, and seemed to be re-evaluating the simplicity of the rules. After taking the prize from the stall keeper and while being seen off by the cheers from the onlookers, the two walked towards the entrance to the main island. On the way, she was scouted by a royal guard who had been watching the shooting range challenge, but Rin politely refused.

\*

“Haah ... There sure were a lot of people ...”

Passing through the gate, they reached the Alphine urban area. The Cyrintpt Mansion was near the center of the island, atop of a small hill. It would take about an hour to go back from here. They decided to take a small break on the bench in the garden of a small church nearby. Once they'd sat down, Rin gently took Miku's hand.

“Here.”

Rin placed in Miku's palm the ring she had won as a

prize earlier.

“Eh ...? You’re giving it to me?”

Opening her eyes wide, Miku stared intently at the ring in her hand.

“... Eh!? Didn’t you want this ring? C-could it be that I got the wrong one!?”

“N-no, that’s not it. It’s very cute, and I thought it looked so wonderful, but ... Since Rin was the one who won it, I think you should wear it.”

Miku smiled, took Rin’s hand, and fit the ring on her right ring finger. It seemed to be a little bit too big.

“I can’t! I won this so Miku could have it!”

Rin took off the ring, and just as Miku had done moments before, she took Miku’s hand and fit the ring on her right ring finger. The ring fit perfectly on Miku’s thin and supple finger, as if it had always been there.

“Wow ... It suits you, just as I thought it would!”

Looking at Miku with the ring on, Rin grinned with both hands clasped loosely behind her head. Compared to the gallant expression she'd had when shooting the targets earlier, her now unfathomably friendly smile made her seem like an entirely different person. The angel that was smiling triumphantly like she'd just pulled off a prank, really didn't seem to have much interest in the ring itself. Perhaps she should simply presume upon this favor.

“... Thank you, Rin.”

Miku smiled shyly, feeling a bit tickled somehow, as if she had had something bought for her just because she'd selfishly said she wanted it. It was as if she were a spoiled child. A long time ago, when she was still a little girl, her mother had bought for her a toy she had wanted, in much the same way. When she thought about, she had never taken anyone's kindness for granted before. She wasn't good at all with being spoiled like this.

“Thank you ... I’ll ... treasure it.”

She gently stroked the beautiful, blooming flower on her right ring finger with her left hand. Rin was smiling beside her, scratching her cheek in slight embarrassment. She decided she’d try depending on her just a little more.

“ ... ”

She rested her head on the delicate angel’s shoulder and leaned against her. Perhaps because she’d been walking since early in the morning, or because of the peaceful sunlight, her eyelids became naturally heavy and she didn’t have the energy to keep them open anymore. The warmth she felt beside her was of a pure and holy presence.

It was so warm —

The gently smiling face that seemed both shy and a bit embarrassed, slumbering in the comfortable weather, looked just like the smile of an angel.

## Part 2: Change

The roaring sound of the swelling flames. The pitch black of the dark night had suddenly been dyed in the red of the huge, spreading flames, and the surroundings echoed with deafening screams and shouts. Maids, butlers, and servants came running for their lives out of the majestically-built mansion.

“My lady ...”

The elderly butler that was standing in front tore off the hem of his scorched tailcoat, and wrapped it around the exposed scrape on her knee. It was not bleeding very much.

Since earlier, she hadn't been able to move; it was as if her body had turned to stone. Even if she wanted to move, she couldn't. That was because—

“Lady Miku ... you mustn't.”

Both of her arms were being pinned down by the servant holding her from behind. A young child had no hopes of resisting against the strength of an adult.

How powerless, and pitiful. She could only catch as her loved ones were left behind to burn in the blazing flames.

“Father ... Moth ... er ...”

The tears wouldn't come. Or rather, they had long since dried up.

She was already tired of crying over “this moment” that would repeat over and over.

“That same dream again ...”

In response to being awakened by the scene from earlier, her consciousness was chilled as ice. The dream that she had seen countless times since her youth— For as long as she could remember, even as she grew older, the traumatic memory of the day she'd lost her parents was engraved into her heart.

She took the glass of water from her bedside table and drank it all in a single gulp. Her dried throat met with tasteless and odorless moisture. As she slowly regained her breath, the sound of her heartbeat also

slowly calmed down. When she looked at the clock, she saw that it wasn't even daybreak yet. It was still too early to be called morning. She debated for a while about going back to sleep. However, every time she had this dream, try as she may, she was never able to fall back asleep.

The prestigious family of Alphine, the Cyrinpts. Their lineage dated back to the founding of Alphine four hundred years prior; a family with much history, known all over Alphine, as well as in neighboring countries. This was due to the fact that, dating back to the three that were well-known at the time of Alphine's founding, along with those that later fought in the long war in Velcant, every successive family head have since had their names recorded in history. Although the current family head— Miku's mother, was the first female head since the House of Cyrinpt had been established, her personality and caliber as a lord was by no means inferior. And while she was Miku's "mother", in terms of kinship, she was actually her non-blood-



related aunt. Miku's real mother and father had died in a fire when she was still three years old.

She had once lived with her parents and several servants in a mansion that was about ten kilometers away from the Cyrinpt Mansion she was currently residing in. It was not a very large mansion; a humble living closer to common people than a noble's. The day the fire had occurred, the young head of the Cyrinpt Mansion, her uncle, had just come to visit. When the fire actually started, Miku had been saved by being brought outside by the butler who helped her get ready for bed. As for her parents and uncle, however, even when the flames died down and the mansions had collapsed, their bodies were nowhere to be found.

The burnt wreckage was severely damaged, and due to everything burning out overnight and turning to ash, not even their remains were left. With her real mother and her younger brother, Miku's uncle, dead, there was a momentary crisis that the legitimate bloodline of Cyrinpt would die out as

well. However, there was still hope of survival with the wife of the previous head. The niece, Miku, was adopted by her to save the continuation of the Cyrint bloodline, and she herself would succeed as the family head.

Her mother loved Miku's uncle — now her late husband — from the bottom of her heart. In order to succeed his will, and protect the prosperity of the bloodline that had continued for generations, she gave up sleep to continue working on socializing, business, and even diplomatic relations. In Miku's case, she received special education to become the next family, and complied with her strict mother. Miku studied hard to live up to her mother-in-law's expectations. In order to not be an embarrassment, and become an honorable noble lady, she put in strenuous effort to study in all areas, including academics, martial arts, visual arts, public speaking, and management.

Everything was for the sake of wanting to live up to the expectations of her mother, who she was not

related to by blood, and also for the simple desire of wanting to be loved by her.

However, the feelings of the young girl who only wanted to be loved were never granted. Ever since the moment she had heard of the death of her beloved husband, whom she loved so dearly, her heart had broken. Even the duty of adopting the beloved daughter of her older sister-in-law and her husband was not out of sympathy for her pitiable niece who had lost both her parents, but because it was written in her late husband's will; she did not have any love for Miku. They simply had a relationship where Miku, as a tool for continuing the family name, was subjected to daily lessons by her. Miku didn't want to accept that she was not loved by her own mother. She did not. If she did, she would lose sight of her own reason to live; such feelings constantly occupied her heart.

One day, surely. With her own efforts, she could live up to those expectations—

With those thoughts in mind, she turned to look out the window. The sunrise slowly illuminated the previously darkened sky. Because she had been so lost in thought over depressing things, it had quickly become morning.

She lightly got up from the bed, and checked the day's plans while getting ready. If not mistaken, today she would go with her mother to the Tard Region to visit a prestigious family there. They would have to depart as soon as they finished breakfast. As she walked down the halls and towards the ground floor, her pace was disheartened, and slightly heavy.

“I will continue speaking with Viscount Iceberg for a while longer, so please return to the villa first.”

At her mother's words, she set out on the journey back to the Iceberg Villa by herself. For about two to three years, the current head of the Icebergs and his son, and the current head of the Cyrinpts, her mother, and she herself, had continued to meet for

simple luncheons, both families steadily deepening their political and economic ties across countries.

Miku had come here with her mother several days ago on a summer trip to the region next to Velcant, the Tard Region. The large continental region, across the Minole Ocean to the east of Folle, consisted of many small countries. If one went farther east, they would reach widely uncivilized land. While Velcant could be said to be the center of the world with their success and prosperity in economy and culture, Tard's people consisted mostly of farmers and peasants, and perhaps because of the nature of their locality, there were very few territorial disputes between those in power. Although it lacked the convenient and gorgeous culture that Velcant had, it was a relaxing country with little social class distinction. In recent years, it was not uncommon for nobles from Velcant to visit to expand their power. Since the era of the previous generation of Cyrinpts, they had a villa in this region, and would stay here during the summer.

It took only half a day by ship from Folle, making it a rather short distance from Alphine.

Folle's Viscount, the Iceberg family, were originally merchants that had come from the Tard Region. Currently, they had established bases in both the Kingdom of Folle and Tard. Since the time of their ancestors, they had crossed the ocean as trade merchants between the small countries of Tard and the Kingdom of Folle. When the armistice that had been put in place a hundred years prior, during the long-continuing war in the Velcant Region, there has been many noble families that arose from the merchant families. The Icebergs were also such a merchant family that had entered the ranks of nobles, one of the so-called "wealthy merchant nobles." With the enormous wealth they had built by taking the abundant resources from Tard to Folle, they entered the power struggle in Velcant as an emerging influence.

Compared to the prestigious family of Cyrinpt, that had been around since the founding of Alphine,

their “status” as nobles differed. However, in an age where it had become difficult to survive on prestige alone, the reason that the Cyrinpts built connections with those that were wealthy was to protect the longevity of their family name. A family with history, and a family with wealth. Both sides deepened their ties with each other because each had something that they desired, but did not have themselves. All of them thought of it as a comforting friendship across their respective residing countries.

The sky was a cloudy gray, and seemed about to rain even now. Between the Iceberg Villa and the Cyrinpt Villa, there was a walking distance of about an hour.

Seeing Miku heading back without even a carriage, the son of the Iceberg family ran up to her, out of breath. When he offered to send her home by carriage, she politely refused. She felt bad about doing so, but she felt like walking today. She told him that she wanted to take a stroll around the port cities of Tard on the way back, and he saw her off

with a slightly troubled expression.

With just her small bag and the black umbrella she'd been given because it might rain, she walked through the beautiful seaside town. If she followed the road that continued along the coast, she would soon reach the villa, but for some reason, she felt like taking a detour home today. The summer sea breeze was blowing relentlessly. Although Alphine was surrounded by a lake on all sides, and looked like an ocean from the shore, it was a completely different compared to being in front of the real thing. As expected, the salty scent carried by the breeze was unfamiliar, and although she had never visited very often, she started feeling nostalgic. Perhaps one of her ancestors had once lived near the ocean before.

Just like this, while staring out at the ocean that seemed to stretch on endlessly, she thought, I want to go to whatever is on the other side. To the ends of the earth, where no one else has gone before. Not as my family's heir, or my mother's tool, but simply as



myself. Without being bound by anything, or for anyone else's sake, simply living for myself. If only I could do such a thing.

As I am now, I can't cross this ocean on my own. If only I had wings. If only I had wings like Rin, able to fly to the ends of this ocean—

“Miku!!”

It was Rin's voice.

She'd somehow become deeply lost in thought, and quickly came back to her senses in confusion.

“Heeey~! Mikuuuu~!!”

No, she hadn't been feeling well lately due to the heat, so she must be hearing things now. She had to hurry home, without idling around.

Just as she turned to walk away from the ocean that she'd been gazing at, her vision was suddenly enveloped in pure white. Elegant, fluttering wings reflected off the light of the water's surface and shone remarkably. It was so bright. When had the

clouds parted for it to be this bright?

“—Rin?”

“Are you alone, Miss~? What’re you doing in a place like this?”

The smiling face of the angel in front of her was so bright; it seemed to give off its own sparkle.

“Fufu ... The weather was so nice out, so I was just taking a stroll.”

“Oh~? What a coincidence! So was I!”

“Oh? Is that so?”

“Hey, let’s go on a date.”

It seemed like she was doing in imitation of the time a man had started flirting with her when she’d been walking through town the other day.

“That sounds fine. Ah, that’s right! Do you see those boats over there? I wanted to ride in one, but I was told I couldn’t by myself. Would you like to ride one together, Rin?”

At her suggestion, the small, innocent angel followed Miku while wearing a curious expression on her face.

The water's surface was calm and quiet, without even a single wind blowing. In the boat rented from the docks were two people, a human girl and—

“Uwaaaaaaah it's shakingggggggg!”

“R-Rin!! The more you move, the more it's going to shake~!”

“B-b-b-butttttttt~”

“Kyaah!”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaah we're going to fall  
heeeeeeeeeelp”

In the calm ocean, there was only one boat that was thrashing around as if facing a violent storm. The couples from the surrounding boats, that were floating quite easily in the pleasant summer ocean, were staring in their direction with some concern.

“It ... seems that ... angels ... are bad ... with moving

vehicles.”

Perhaps because the shaking of the waves had startled her, Rin had been the only one to be in a huge panic since boarding the boat, and as a result of that, she seemed seasick. With a pale face, she stared uncomfortably at the water’s surface.

“Pff- ...”

No, she musn’t laugh. Even if this angel, that had an image of flying freely through the skies and seemed able to face any obstacle, was now seasick from riding a boat in an ocean with no waves, and staring at the water with an unfocused, reproachful gaze. But, she couldn’t hold it in any longer.

“Ahahahahaha—“

Unable to bear it anymore, she laughed in a loud voice. Hearing this, the angel in front of her complained with a pale expression.

“Th-that’s so mean! Don’t laugh ...!”

“I-I’m sorry ... I-it is just ... too funny ... fufufu,

ahahaha!”

It didn’t seem that the laughter would be subsiding anytime soon. Rin always managed to pull off whatever she did, even if it didn’t seem like something an angel would do. The impressions that angels had is said to be decided by humans’ wild fantasies, but with Rin, it was something different.

“Uuuu ... How uncool~”

“Isn’t it fine since you’re cute? Miss Seasick Angel~”

“I-it’s not like ... I’m happy or anything ...”

Even her usual forceful reply lacked energy.

“Although, you were so amazing last time~”

The angel was cute when she had her guard down, and Miku couldn’t help but find herself teasing her.

“Last time” meant the Glosse Market that had taken place the other day. She had carried all of the heavy bags by herself, challenged a difficult shooting range booth they’d happened to come across, and gotten the prize that no one else had been able to win. That

day, Rin had played something like the role of a hero.

“Speaking of which ... Have you ever fired a gun before, Rin?”

A simple question. After she’d asked her maid about it, she’d learned that that shooting range had required quite a bit of skill, and other than Rin, there seemed to have been only one other person that had won a prize.

“Eh? A gun ...? Yeah, I have ...”

With both the panic and swaying subsided, some of the color had returned to Rin’s face. Although when she answered, she still seemed a bit listless.

“R-really now ...! That’s rather unexpected. It was very surprising to me.”

“... Unexpected? Actually, I have a gun with me right now. Look.”

Rin said, and pulled out a pure white gun to show her. It looked different from the guns Miku had seen

before; completely white without a hint of dullness.

“Wow ...! It’s my first time seeing a pure white gun. So there are even guns in the world of angels ...”

“Eh? You say weird things, Miku. There’s nothing in the human world that doesn’t exist in Heaven.”

The angel smiled honestly. Nothing in the human doesn’t exist in Heaven. In other words ...

“Umm, well I don’t know how humans imagine the way Heaven works, but most things in the human world are things taken from Heaven, for one reason or another. If I remember correctly, about five hundred years ago, a gun was carelessly dropped by an angel during a mission, and the human that picked it up spread it—or rather, I think it just wound up getting around the human world ... So humans didn’t even know about this, huh ...?”

“... That’s true. There’s so many things that we, humans, don’t know ...”

Because they don’t know, they want to know. That’s

what it means to be human. Probably.

“But, they’ve only taken things that are ‘based’ on the original thing. For example, this boat. In Heaven, there’s a cradle that boats are based off of, but it doesn’t float in the water. Instead, it floats through the sky. That way, when we get tired, we can travel even without using our wings. It’s made from leaves, so it’s light and compact, and easy to carry around.”

“Really ...! Then, do you get sick when you ride the cradles, Rin?”

When she asked this, Rin chuckled, and replied somewhat shyly.

“Um, about that, I’m used to wind waves! Once I get used to the waves in the ocean, I won’t be scared anymore.”

“Fufu. Then, shall we do this again sometime?”

Rin’s lips drew back slightly.

“Tell me, is there anything else? Things which



angels have given to humans.”

“Hmm ... It’s safe to say that most things in the human world are ... It’s just that the lifestyle between angels and humans ... Or, more like, the ecology is pretty different, so I can’t really say anything ...”

“Oh? ... Now that I think about it, when you lived at my house, you were surprised at even ordinary things. When I’d go to sleep, you’d whine the whole time, going, ‘You’re sleeping *already*—?’”

“‘Ordinary’ ...!? That’s ... That’s because eating and sleeping is nothing more than preference to angels; we won’t die even if we don’t do either. We don’t need to sleep at a certain time every night like you do. ... Well, it feels nice sleeping under the sunlight so I do, though. Anyway, it was boring once you’d go to sleep, Miku. Lily stays up until the middle of the night, but whenever I spoke to her, she’d want to use me as a dress-up doll— ...”

“Fufu. I apologize for that. It sounds convenient that

you don't need to eat nor sleep. Does that mean that angels don't die?"

As she asked this, she remembered, about the day that she'd met Rin. She had injured her wing, and seemed very weak. Did that mean that angels could die from injuries, just like humans could?

"Angels don't die from reaching the end of their lifespan. Our appearances change over time like humans do when they grow older, but we can preserve our appearance at our own timing. If I didn't want to look any older than I do now, I could look like this forever. Ah, but we can't do the reverse, though ... That's why we can't die from old age. We die when our holy power is used up. The truth is, even humans have holy power. Miku, you're able to see me, aren't you? That means that you have a lot of holy power in you. Although it's rare, it seems that humans with a higher level of holy power than ordinary people are able to sense the presence of angels."

“... Holy ... power ...”

“Right. Well, even so, humans aren’t able to manipulate it, so they probably don’t realize~ Holy power is the power of God. In both Heaven and in these lands, there’s holy power everywhere, but there are places where it’s more concentrated. In the human world, that would be the Velcant Region ... And it’s especially strong here in Alphine. The reason is because it used to be a part of Heaven. ... Ah, although I can’t tell you about the details about that ... In any case, in the center of Rulen Island in Alphine is Claude Cathedral, right? Where we first met. It’s a place for angels to rest their wings when they come down to the human world. Holy power is strong there, and the long spiral staircase that continues up to the cathedral is used for all kinds of training.”

“I see ...”

Miku nodded in understanding. Perhaps because Rin was always conscious of being viewed in a

respectful light by her, she told Miku things about “Heaven,” which she rarely talked about.

“Next is ... Apples, I guess.”

“Apples ...?”

“Yeah! ... Apples are fruit that God made with especially high holiness. That’s why, both in Heaven and in the human world, they’re so delicious because of being more holy than regular food. By the way, in Heaven, I’m an expert in cultivating apples~”

As she spoke triumphantly, it seemed that this angel became passionate when it came to lectures about apples. She resembled Lily just a bit.

“Although there are many kinds of plants in Heaven, all angels love apples. It’s not like we’ll die if we don’t eat them, but apples are the one thing that everyone loves to eat. And, I know how to breed a lot of different kinds of apples to make the most delicious ones. The apples that I grow are really tasty. There’s many angels that becomes fans just

from one bite.”

Rin declared with flames of passion dancing behind her beautiful, blue eyes. As she thought, she was just like Lily when she talked about producing, but she kept that to herself in order to not spoil the mood.

“Oh, right!”

Looking like she’d just remembered something, Rin casually pulled something out from the pocket of her clothes. It was a red, ripe, delicious-looking apple.

“I’ll give this to you, Miku. I picked this with confidence this morning.”

It would seem that the apple that Rin was holding out was one that she had cultivated in Heaven.

“Is it ... really alright for me to take it?”

She had the feeling that Rin had said something before about how it was forbidden for angels and humans to interact. However, seeing as how they met like this frequently, and was even told about the

structure of things in Heaven, it seemed like Rin didn't pay much mind to that rule ...

“U-ummm ... .. Yeah! It's fine! You can have it!!”

After a moment of hesitation, she held it out again with a slightly forced smile, and Miku slowly took the fruit. When she took a bite, it was very sweet, and more delicious than anything she had ever tasted. Was it because this was an apple from Heaven? Or was it because, just as Rin had said, it was an apple cultivated by a professional? As she spoke out about her impression honestly, the angel before her blushed slightly, and became shy.

“Rin, you're so knowledgeable, and can do anything from target shooting to growing apples; You really are an amazing angel ... You're still so young, yet so lovely.”

Although at first glance, she appeared to be an adorable and delicate young girl, the fact that she had actually proved to be very knowledgeable and capable of doing anything must be because she was

an angel ... As Miku thought this, she suddenly realized something. Earlier, hadn't Rin said that angels could control the timing at which they aged?

Up until that point, the angel had been smiling happily, but now, she met her gaze with a somehow shocked expression.

"... Haaah. I thought you'd say that ... It's been about one hundred and fifty years since I've come into this world as an angel. Ah ... By the way, for angels, that's still considered young."

"One hundred and fifty ..."

Every new thing that this adorable angel told her was so interesting. Furthermore, the saying, "looks can be deceiving," were surely also something that had been taken from Heaven.

\*

It was afternoon in Griselle Water Garden, sparkling as it reflected the sunlight streaming in through the tree leaves. On the banks of the huge, beautiful

fountain that rose up in the center was the usual meeting place. Made from a complex knitted formation of large branches, numerous swings hanging from them, and tables fashioned also from branches, angels often came here to rest there to rest their wings while enjoying a meal. In particular, the seats near the fountain with the nice view were a popular spot that was usually crowded during tea time and other breaks.

Today, as usual, four angels had met together and picked out a spot to enjoy a slightly early afternoon tea. The sunlight was warm; it was a very relaxing and calm afternoon. There was just one thing a little off. Since a while ago, one young man had his arms crossed and eyes closed, and was giving off a cold air. He held a fifty-centimeter radius of space around him. Beside the sulking, blue-haired young man was a blonde-haired girl, panicking with a pale and troubled expression.

“Like I said, I ... I do ... feel bad about it, you know ...?”



“ ... ”

“I’m reflecting on it! Really! I am ...!”

“ ... ”

“—Look! I even wrote a reflection statement here ...!”

“ ... ”

“Ah~ ... Although, there was ... just a bit of trouble, so ... um, it got soaking wet like this, and it’s ... barely legible now, but ... I-I’ll write it over again!”

“ ... ”

“And, anyway! Here, look! At this delicious-looking apple! I finished growing it just the other day, and named it, ‘Golden Apple’! The crunchy yet soft texture creates a light rhythm that leaves you refreshed, and the moment you take a bite, the melting harmony of sweetness and sourness is like truly ascending to Heaven ... It’s the sweet and elegant taste of ecstasy. Even that bird of paradise was drooling with glimmering eyes as it waited for

the delicious fruit to ripen on the tree; the very embodiment of captivation ...!”

As Rin rambled on, the girl sitting across from her, Gumi, listened with wide, sparkling, bright green eyes, and her mouth hanging half-open. There was a bit of drool dripping from the edge. Rin felt strangely convinced that the reason that prideful, bird of paradise hasn't been singing much recently was because it, too, had been too busy drooling. Beside Gumi, the young man that was holding a tea cup to his lips in an elegant fashion, Gaku, was staring with an empty, hardened gaze, as if imagining the taste of this exquisite apple. It would seem that all angels really did love apples.

“... Was that all you wanted to say?”

Came a single, cold statement, as if to put a stop of the two angels' fantasies. Kaito slowly opened his eyes, and with a completely unrestrained expression, he glanced over to stare at Rin, who was sitting beside him. His gaze wasn't just cold; those

eyes were ones he used only when he was genuinely angry. Rin felt herself shrink even smaller than she already was from the intimidation.

“I’m ... really sorry ...”

With all of her sincerity, she apologized one more time. However, his eyes didn’t budge in the slightest. Gumi, who was drooped next to Rin, had just finished eating to the top of the apple tower in her fantasies and suddenly snapped back to her senses. timidly finding her way into the conversation.

“U-um! Rin-chan didn’t do it on purpose! It was an, err, accident ... or, better put, just how it ended up? She didn’t mean anything bad by it! Anyway, it was my fault she went to the human world this time, so ... Please forgive her ...! If you’re going to punish her, then punish me as well ...!”

While trembling in fear under Kaito’s force, Gumi desperately protected Rin. Some tears had accumulated in her eyes. Gaku, who had also been

daydreaming of swimming in a sea of apple juice like a shark, quickly returned to his senses, as well. The two of them were very similar.

“I see, I see ... Gumi, it should have been my obligation, as your partner, to provide you supervision and assistance when you went to the human world for investigation. Therefore, the one that should be held liable is I. Allow me to receive punishment as well, Lord Kaito.”

“Wait! Gumi! And even Gaku ...! But this has nothing to do with you! I appreciate what you’re doing but, this is ... It’s all ... my own fault.”

Her fault.

She admitted it, that “that” had been a mistake, despite her efforts of not wanting to admit that allowing Miku to eat an apple from Heaven had been something forbidden.

“... Is that so? Then, you’ll admit that it was a mistake to give one of our apples to the likes of a human?”

“... Y-yes. It’s written in the law that it’s now allowed, after all. ‘It is forbidden to directly give humans food from Heaven.’”

“... The law, hm? That may be so, but it doesn’t seem as though you believed you’d done something wrong at the time, does it?”

“Uuu ...”

Rin froze as she was glared at. Truthfully, up until now, she hadn’t thought she’d done anything wrong. She felt sorry that she’d caused trouble for not only herself, but also for Gumi, Gaku, and most of all, Kaito.

“I really don’t think I’ve done anything bad by giving Miku the apple. But, I’m really sorry that I’ve caused trouble to all of you for doing so. So that’s why I think it to be my fault.”

Miku—

The name of a human that he had heard from Rin’s mouth so many times. Every time he heard Rin say

that name, Kaito felt a twinge of annoyance.

“In that case, I cannot say that you’re really reflecting on it. Even I cannot overlook this situation. I will report your action to the higher-ups, and have them give you the appropriate punishment.”

Rin could feel tears begin to build up from Kaito’s cold, piercing words.

“No way ...! Please, wait just a minute!”

“Indeed; in the first place, it was something that happened under my and Gumi’s jurisdiction.”

“Excuses are of no use.”

Completely unmovable, Kaito simply said this and stood from his seat.

“But the truth is, that apple was originally meant for Archangel Kaito ...!”

“!”

Kaito looked surprised at Gumi’s sudden outburst.

Rin had planned to give the apple to Kaito, but because she'd been called out on an emergency, she had taken the apple with her to the human world before she'd had the opportunity to.

Yesterday, Rin had been suddenly called out by Gumi, and putting a hold on her unfinished work, she had rushed down to the human world. Rin and Gumi had been promoted from trainees to junior angels at about the same time, and even when their training period together had ended, they continued to get along just as well as they had been. Although the regions they were assigned to were different, in times when either of them was busy, they would ask each other to help with their work. This time, in the Tard Region that Gumi was assigned to, because the Ascension list had suddenly been added to, Rin had gone to assist with their lack of manpower. Gumi's direct superior, Gaku, had been involved in some other important work as an Archangel, taking with him a large unit, which led Gumi to call on Rin for help, who occasionally had days off.

With Rin's help, the Ascension mission had been successfully finished, but that was when Rin saw Miku for the first time in a while. Seeing as how Tard was quite a distance from Miku's mansion in Velcant, she had doubted it at first, but once she had gotten closer, it really had been her, after all. Because Rin had been busy with work in Heaven and hadn't met with Miku in about a month, she assumed this to be the workings of fate, and had jumped at the chance. Miku had smiled so happily when she'd found Rin, as well. As the two of them got caught up in their chatting, Rin had ended up giving it to her—the exquisite apple that had so quickly caused Gumi and Gaku to be caught in a sweet fantasy ... the Golden Apple.

When it had finally ripened, Rin had tasted it immediately, and found the apple to be her greatest masterpiece yet. Rin had wanted to share these feelings with someone else as soon as possible, and had taken one more from the branches.

That's right—if she remembered correctly, Kaito



had looked like he'd been in a very bad mood after opposing the newly passed law until the very end during the Archangel meeting.

As she thought of this, Rin had decided to give him one of the few remaining of this prototype apple. She would give this exquisite apple to him, who hid the fact that he liked apples under his usual poker face. As soon as he ate this, he'd be able to forget all about his bad mood. That was about as far as she'd gotten with her plan before being called out on an emergency by Gumi.

"I do apologize, Kaito. Although I did receive a report from them once they'd returned, I had not realized the graveness of the situation. But, by no means, had I been captivated by the apple Rin had been carrying or anything of the sort!"

Kaito glanced at Gaku, and let out an inward sigh. This colleague of his was very capable, and could get the job done, but he was lacking in some areas.

What happened afterwards was easy to imagine.

After Rin and Gumi had finished worked, they'd picked plenty of apples, gone to secure the popular spot early on, and had Gaku brew up a blend of his special tea. The two of them honestly hadn't thought too deeply about how Rin had broken the law, but just in case, in order to not undermine Kaito's mood, they had prepared a convincing-enough reflection statement. However, when Rin had been flying with both of her arms full of apples, she had accidentally dropped it into the large fountain, rendering it illegible. Up until Kaito had arrived, they never would have imagined something like this happen, and had been chatting happily about how they might be able to finally see an exceptional smile from him today.

After hearing all the details of what had happened, Kaito sat back down, still seeming displeased. However, his mood seemed to have gotten a bit better.

“Using an urgent request for assistance, in this busy period, to handle an Ascension list with two people

...”

“Uuu ...”

“Putting aside his poor supervision of subordinates, and instead engaging in carefree preparations for an apple-eating meal ...”

“Uuu—”

“Without thinking wrongly of breaking the law, preparing a large bribe for the sake of saving her superior’s mood, and moreover, besides the most crucial thing, the written apology, being copied word for word from the Heaven Current Affairs Archives, the number of spelling errors makes it a barely passable quality. And to make matters even worse ... It was submitted in this damaged state ...”

“Uuuu ...”

The three of them were each stabbed the words that Kaito had fired at them. It seemed to be rather effective.

“... *Honestly*. As expected, even I cannot turn a blind

eye to all of this.”

With an appalled expression, but with a slightly calm color in the depths of his eyes, Kaito quietly held a cup. The roasted tea at Gaku made really was exceptionally delicious.

“““We’re so sorry!”””

As the three of them deeply bowed their heads, Kaito sighed.

“Well, I suppose I can manage to talk something out with the higher-ups. ... And, my absence last night, however slight, is also to blame in this.”

Hearing this, the depressed mood the three had just been in dispersed, and they immediately cheered up.

“Waah! As expected of Archangel Kaito! He’s so reliable in times of need!”

“Yes, quite. I see it very clearly now. Despite appearances, Lord Kaito is deeply compassionate and merciful.”

“Yay~! Not guiltyyyy!”

“... And what has become of all of your subdued behavior just a moment ago?”

“Ahh—! Come to think of it, I haven’t eaten this apple yet.”

Gumi suddenly remembered “Today’s Leading Role” that lay completely forgotten on the table.

“That’s right, that’s right~! Hey, Kaito, come eat some, too!”

Without any objections, the three of them were already stuffing their mouths full of apples. They had very nice smiles on their faces.

“So good~!! I’ve never eaten such a delicious apple before~”

With a full-faced smile, Gumi expressed her feelings of a taste she had never tasted before.

“Isn’t it? It’s the best masterpiece of the talented producer, Rin.”

“Indeed, this is ... a pleasure I have not yet experienced before ... A truly mystical taste.”

As the three of them livened up and soon left him behind, for some reason, Kaito simply couldn't grasp the situation. Was it because earlier, Rin has said that she had wanted him to be the first one to eat this apple? Or had he misheard her?

“Huh? What's wrong, Kaito? The tea doesn't suit your taste?”

“... No, it's nothing of the sort.”

With a displeased face, he took a bite out of an apple. Certainly, it did taste delicious enough to make one's face brighten. He had to admit that Rin had talent in cultivating apples. It surely could be said that this was her best masterpiece up until now.

“As I suspected, apples truly are the best for angels. Simply by eating them, any and all trivial matters are soon forgotten.”

“... You forget too much as it is, even without

eating.”

“Hm? Could you possibly be ...”

“...?”

“Ah, no, it is nothing at all.”

Perhaps—thought Gaku,

This young man had not actually been angry that she had broken the law ... The exquisite apple that Rin had grown with all of her effort—she had wanted to share that taste together with her feelings, with him. “I wanted Kaito be the first one to eat this.” His expression when she had said that ...

As if he had been waiting for those very words.

Telling himself that it would be unrefined to pry any further than this, he put on an innocent air again, and continued to eat the alluring fruit that he held in his right hand.

“Ah, truly magnificent.”

## Part 3: Seedling

“No.”

“You must.”

“N-o.”

“Y-o-u m-u-s-t.”

“Nononono!”

“Youmustyoumustyoumustyoumust!”

“Nononononononononononono!”

“Youmustyoumustyoumustyoumustyoumustyoumu  
—”

“I said *no*!! Ugh!!!”

The long-continuing childish replies of “no” and “you must” ended with Rin’s final “no.” It was yet another “produce” battle between these two as they went through preparations at the Cyrinpt Mansion. The battle between the perfect, high-quality material, Rin, and the one boasted as being the most



talented tailor in all of Velcant, Lily, had heated up in a way it never had before in the one year since they had met. This was for certain. The theme for today was—

“Even if I die, I’ll never wear such a frilly, black dress! No *way*!”

“My! What a terrible thing to say! Such an ill omen!”

“That’s ‘cause I don’t like it!”

“Even so, it’s going too far to bring up the word ‘die’ over such a thing!”

“It’s a *figure of speech*! As in, I hate it so much that I’d rather die. In the first place, just how much work do you think an angel has to deal with for the afterlife when a single human dies?! I don’t want to be told something like that by someone who doesn’t know a thing about ... things like that!”

“Eh ...? The afterlife?”

“...! Ah~ No, it’s just ... you know, I’m sure that even after people die, there’s a lot to deal with~ That’s

how much I hate it, is what I mean!”

Normal humans probably wouldn't know how much work that angels have to deal with when a person dies. Moreover, it was probably rare for human to even think about such things. From the viewpoint of the angel who had just said something careless, the human Lily lapsed into thought with a questioning expression on her face.

“If angels existed, I'm sure that it *would* be a lot of work, but for that to be the reason you would rather die than go through with the fitting ... But I even went through all the trouble of using the rare material from the Glosse Market~ It was quite difficult to get something like this, you know~? The owner of the shooting gallery was fairly stingy with it.”

“I don't like things I don't like!”

“Ohh!”

It would seem that this time, Lily had run out of patience. Up until now, most of her victories had

been due to Miku contributing confidential information or sweets to bribe Rin with. However, this time ... Lily sighed in disappointment, and made to leave the dress-up room. The banquet, which was planned a week from now, had a formal dress code. Rin often came to this mansion as a guest, and was already treated like a younger sister by Miku. For that reason, Rin was specifically asked to dress for the banquet, but no matter what, she refused to wear this outfit.

The unique formal dress code of the Kingdom of Alphine is to be dressed in all black. In Alphine, the color black is valued as the royal color, and for gatherings at ceremonies or at the royal palace, nobles and other aristocracy primarily favor black as the formal dress; this custom has continued for the past three hundred years. Three hundred years ago in Velcant, before the current major powers to the east and west had been founded, there was an era where both large and small countries alike were caught in a struggle for supremacy. In the middle of

this, Züscheno III, who reigned over the Kingdom of Alphine at the time, thought up various laws in order to strengthen his country and its people. Of those, there was one such law that required everyone to dress in all black in times of war.

Within all of the colors, black is the one color that cannot be tainted by other colors, and can always pierce through inviolability. On the flipside, this black could dye any and all other colors. Züscheno III thought of this as a symbol of his power. In order to raise the morale of his soldiers and people in the prolonged war, he passed this law. This cultural operation that he had thought up had been intended as a mental backup, but because it had been so deeply supported by the people at the time, the custom of black being the most supreme color still remained to this day.

Lily attempted to briefly explain the progression of Alphine's history and culture, but Rin hadn't been listening at all.

A banquet, in which nobles from various countries would be attending, was going to be held at the Cyrintpt Mansion the following week. Miku and the family head, naturally, as well Lily and all other residents of the mansion would need to be formally dressed in all black. No matter how much of a freewheeling noble lady she was, she would not be able to withhold the honor as one of the Cyrintpts in her usual white clothes. Lily sighed with a genuinely troubled expression on her face.

“... If you’re going to be this disobedient, Lady Miku won’t like you!”

Twitch.

Rin’s ears reacted in such a predictable way in response to hearing the word “Miku,” they almost seemed to emit a sound. Lily had only muttered this under her breath as the sore loser, and had not expected her to be able to hear. In the human world, it seemed that this was known as having “hellish ears.” The saying merely meant to have

exceptionally keen hearing, but because of the word “hell,” it didn’t hold a very good impression with her.

“In the first place, you’re constantly going on about ‘production’. Why’re you so persis... I mean, umm ... passionate, about it?”

Although Rin had only asked this off-handedly, Lily’s eyes gleamed as if she had been waiting for this question. She cleared her throat in a pompous manner while adjusting glasses that weren’t there. By the time Rin realized that she shouldn’t have asked this, Lily had already opened her mouth.

“Production ... is the ultimate form of art. In other words, it is the art of creating, Lady Rin.”

“Huh~?”

Rin tilted her head in confusion.

“Ah- ... Oh, yes, I know. Lady Rin, I shall explain it simply, plainly, and courteously, in a way in which you will be able to easily understand~ ...”

“ ... ”

Rin looked at Lily, slightly disgruntled. Even though she was the one that had lived longer than this young lady, Lily always acted as if she were really the older one, and spoke down to her like an elder sister.

“Let’s see ... Lady Rin, you believe in the existence of ‘God,’ correct? God created this ‘world.’ In other words, this is His creation. This world ‘began’ from the moment God created it. And even now, this world is continuing. In other words, it means that the creation is not yet finished. Which is why, I, too, wish to continue painting the many materials of this world in many colors ... I wish to give them shape. In other words, I wish to paint you—paint the world.”

For a moment, the girl’s earnest words stuck her heart. She wanted to color a part of the world. Even if, for instance, that was the canvas of her tiny life as a single human being, continuing each day unfulfilling, small, and cramped.

Rin felt somewhat touched by Lily's "human words." She thought about it. Up until now, what have I colored? What color is my heart right now?

For what purpose am I "alive" right now?

A long time ago, she had been asked something similar to this. However, back then, even the meaning of the question had been vague to her, and she hadn't thought about it very deeply.

Rin snapped out of her thoughts and lifted her face. Lily was looking at her with slight concern. She had both of her hands clasped high in tight fists from when she'd been giving her fervent speech; it looked like the manly pose of someone who had just won a fistfight.

"Your world is so wonderful. Your color is ... It's elegant, brilliant, bold, but somehow warm ... Like gold. Even in the decoration part of tailoring, just by putting in a bit of gold, the appearance of the entire thing improves."

"! ... I-is ... that so ...? That makes me feel



embarrassed, somehow. Ah, Lady Rin's color is yellow! Because people are able to cheer up simply by seeing you ... Even on cloudy days, or at night, your mere presence causes the surroundings to shine so brightly."

For the moment, the two of them stared at each other in silence. Because they didn't usually have many serious conversations together, they were unfamiliar to this kind of situation. On the contrary, they'd wound up praising each other quite a bit, so thinking about it calmly, it was rather embarrassing. Unable to withstand this downright unbearable atmosphere any longer, Rin purposely hid her embarrassment by avoiding the subject.

"A-anyway, back to the topic! This doesn't really have anything to do with it ... No matter how much wonderful your production is, I still haven't said one word about becoming your material."

With that small and even face, Rin nodded at her own sound argument.

“And besides,”

Focusing on one point, she looked at Lily with a slightly grim expression.

“I hate the color black.”

Those simple words made Lily draw her breath. Simple words that expressed the angel’s true feelings. In the face of the intimidation that had changed the atmosphere in mere seconds, Lily seemed completely overwhelmed.

“Ah ... S-sorry. I said too much ...”

Noticing Lily’s slightly scared expression, Rin hastily apologized.

“Umm ... It’s not that I hate the outfit that you’ve prepared or anything ...! I think that this dress is very lovely, really, I do. But, I can’t wear it. It ... has to do with some circumstances with my family. You see, in my family, it’s a little different~ In this country, black is the color for formal dress, right? But in my country, black is seen as an ominous color.

No ... It's more than that; it's almost like taboo. That's why, if I were to wear these clothes and my family were to see me ... Ahh, in particular, if my older brother were to ... Just thinking about it makes me shudder~”

The moment she said this, and imagined her “older brother,” Rin hung her head.

“I see ... Lady Rin, I never knew that you had an older brother ... Ah, we'll put that matter aside for now. If that's the case, it's a shame ... but I suppose it can't be helped.”

As if to break the serious atmosphere, a modest knocking could be heard at the door. After saying “come in,” there stood the girl that Rin had been waiting for this entire time.

“Miku!”

Rin seemed to completely forget about her conversation with Lily, and skipped over to where Miku was. To begin with, today had been a day off from work in Heaven, so she had come to see Miku

for the first time in a while. After waiting all morning, it was difficult to hide her happiness of finally being able to see her.

“I’m sorry, Rin. It seems ... that I’ve made you wait for quite a while.”

As usual, Miku’s smile was like a blossoming flower, but somehow, it seemed stiff. Had something happened?

Miku briefly showed them the souvenirs she had brought: for Lily, a lace cloth made from high-quality silk, and for Rin, sweets that had been fashioned into unique shapes. With joyful faces, the two of them rushed to make preparations for tea. Rin had already begun to stuff her cheeks with the special sweets that Miku had brought back.

“Speaking of which, Lady Miku, about the upcoming banquet ... No matter what I’ve said, Lady Rin has refused to wear the outfit that I’ve prepared for her ...”

While pouring the tea from the pot, Lily told Miku

about today's happenings with a reasoning face. Rin gulped down the sweets that she had stuffed in both of her cheeks, and looked between the two uncomfortably.

“~~~But~ ...”

“Oh, my. Rin, do you not like those clothes?”

“... Yeah. It'd be fine if they weren't black.”

“That's troubling ... Although it wouldn't be a problem if it weren't being held here.”

If it were a simple, casual reception, normal formal dress would have been acceptable.

“... Alright, then. It's a shame, but ... I won't be going to time, since I don't want to cause any trouble for you, Miku. You'll hold another party again sometime, right?”

Rin muttered this, a little disappointed.

“... Actually, Rin ... and Lily, too. About the banquet ... I have ... something important to say.”

“Huh?”

The two of them said this at the same time. Miku looked at them both with a slightly perplexed expression.

“Umm ... We wanted to keep a secret from everyone for a while longer, but ... I’m ... to be married to the son of Viscount Iceburg.”

“M-marriage ...!?”

In the quiet late afternoon, their surprised voices echoed. The over brewed tea had become lukewarm in its pot, and had turned slightly bitter from the melted tea leaves.

It was evening, the dark blue of night slowly spreading out in the still faintly orange sky. Through the main gate of the Cyrimpt Mansion, one of the most prestigious since the founding of Alphine, many carriages continued to come and go. Ladies dressed in gorgeous clothes exited the luxurious carriages, and gentlemen dressed in fancy tuxedos escorted them with elegant gestures. As soon as they

ascended the stone staircase, a butler would respectfully open the door for them, and bow with perfect posture. This scene had been repeated numerous times by now—The rooms were cleaned and decorated more than they usually were, and the fleet-footed maids were busy working. Today, hundreds of nobles from all over Velcant had gathered in the Cyrimpt Mansion.

After passing through the mansion's entrance hall and ascending the grand staircase in the center, there was the grand hall that was the main venue for the banquet. Many nobles had already gathered there to socialize. If you were to sweep your gaze around the elegant and regal room, you would see that nearly half of the people here were dressed in black clothing. The custom of black being the color in events of high prestige was proving to be true. The people that had come from the east Folle Kingdom and the west Violente Kingdom each had their own colorful outfits, but as if to pay homage to Alphine's customs, black was, without fail, used as

an accent color somewhere in their outfit or as an accessory. Without any wars between the three countries for the past fifty years, all the rulers that were gathered here tonight were all chatting calmly. However, because of the customs and features of their individual countries, each of them could be differentiated by the way they dressed and how they acted.

Watching as people in the distance danced and chatted peacefully, she leaned wearily against the wall. Although they hid them from sight, it couldn't be helped that her wings felt cramped under these human clothes. Touching her back with the back of her hand, she heaved a huge sigh for the umpteenth time today.

“Lady Rin, if you keep sighing like that, it'll ruin your pretty face~ ...”

Cheerful as always, Lily suddenly spoke up from beside her. In just that brief glance, she seemed to return that stare with a somehow thoughtful look.



“... That’s not true ... Hm~ Actually, it’s kind of ... No, this might be pretty good, actually.”

With a straight face, Lily came up close to her, staring. As if taking her in, she was observing her complete from head to toe, and somehow, it made her feel more uncomfortable than usual.

“... What’s with you ... Is something wrong?”

Lily would always compliment her nonstop no matter she wore, but for some reason, she was staring with a slightly steep expression right now. Was she feeling unwell? Come to think of it, she couldn’t help but notice that her face had been red for a while now. She had heard that in the human world, idiots don’t catch cold, so she was probably alright, though.

“Umm ... Lily?”

When she reached out for her pink face, for some reason, she flinched briefly and backed away. Just what was going on here?

“What’s wrong? You don’t look so well. Did you catch a cold or something?”

“N-no. It’s nothing. I’ve just allowed my heart to fall into a bit of disarray.”

“?”

Still red, she looked left and right, coughed quietly, and continued.

“Incidentally ... Although it was against your will, your clothes today — ... They suit you very well.”

Speaking of “her clothes today,” Rin stared at her reflection in the wall-length glass window. Made from the highest material, the sophisticated, black tuxedo was fitted perfectly to her body. The jacket design was currently in fashion, with a ribbon tied loosely around the neck.

No matter how you looked at her, today, Rin looked like a flawless “pretty boy.” Since all the ladies kept turning back to look at her whenever they passed by, this time, it was her turn to blush.

“I guess ... I don’t think I look much different than usual, though.”

“Oh, that’s not true at all! You look completely different! Ahh ... Although, if possible, I would have liked to have dressed you myself ...”

With an extremely disappointed expression, Lily lamented. For today’s banquet, she had been in charge of producing all the members of the Cyrimpt Mansion. Lily had been so busy with dressing Miku and the rest all morning that she hadn’t had a change to get to Rin. The outfit had been completed the previous day, but it seemed that, as the producer, she had been the one that most wanted to see it worn perfectly.

“Oh, but still~ ... I specialize in female clothing, so while I believe princess clothes suit Lady Rin the most ... Today’s pretty boy look is also quite nice. Yes, very lovely! As expected, this is thanks to the gift of ‘Lily Produce’ enhancing the quality of the material to the very finest ... Yes, yes, just as

expected.”

Seeming to take interest in the workmanship of Rin’s transformation into a perfect pretty boy, Lily gradually returned to her usual habits and seemed delighted at the completely finished product.

“... Ah, I’ll have this.”

As Rin ignored her rambling with half-disgust, a maid came around with alcohol, and taking the glass of wine, she drained it all in one gulp.

“... fuu”

Wiping the bit that had dripped with her hand, Lily stared with a surprised look on her face. She didn’t scold her to her unrefined behavior, either.

“... What is it this time?”

“N-no, it’s nothing. Um. I just thought, you’re quite unique ... Ah! Speaking of which, Lady Rin, I had no idea that know that you drank~”

“When have I ever said that I don’t?”

“Ahh, well certainly, you haven’t, but ... How should I put this—It’s a bit surprising considering the cute face you have~”

“Saying I’m cute is unnecessary!”

Slamming the empty glass down on the table, she cast her gaze towards the crowd of people in the center of the hall. There, today’s leading star, Miku, and her new fiancé—the son of Viscount Iceburg, were exchanging greetings with the guests. As usual, Miku received hot gazes from all the gentlemen that were around her. And also as usual, her outfit today was one that Lily had put all of her effort into producing. Accented with a single white lily on the neckline, the black mermaid dress’ design complemented the beautiful curves of her body in a mature fashion. The two had announced their engagement during the opening ceremony for the banquet, and all the nobles and mansion residents that were gathered had given their blessing.

Her heart pained with a prickling feeling. She didn’t

like it, seeing her—Miku, getting along and talking with someone other than herself. And what was more, that someone was neither family nor a friend, but a man that held the title of being her fiancé. Ever since she had met her, and even now, there were often occasions where she would prioritize other people over her. However, she was an angel. She knew that humans had their own relationships, and hadn't particularly paid any attention to it. But still, that day ... when she had suddenly heard the word “marriage” leave her mouth. Ever since then, she had become very interested in the son of Viscount Iceburg, and would go to observe him during her work breaks, and eavesdrop secretly when he was with Miku. All of this was because she couldn't help but feel irritated from seeing the two of them getting along.

Before she'd noticed, the music performance had turned to a relaxed ballad, and everyone hurried to finish their conversation and begin the dance. She remembered hearing about this song from Lily. It

was a love waltz written three hundred years prior by a popular composer at the time, Earl Samon d'Doloppe, during the Cultural Revolution that Züscheno III had started during his reign.

Because she had thoroughly studied manners and the minimal knowledge that nobles should know, she was a little happy that she could manage without embarrassing herself. Lily had told her that she would have to dance the contemporary version of the song, arranged by Master Yama Yan Delta, so after copious practice, she was now able to dance it perfectly.

Looking around, she saw, in the center of the hall she had been looking so irritably at earlier, not Miku, but Viscount Iceburg and other surrounding people dancing. It seemed that all of the men were having their hearts stolen by Miku's beauty. With already several wine glasses, they walked up with determination in the hall where everyone was dancing. It was a gentle arrangement with a graceful melody. While swaying in tune with the music,

Miku nodded politely to each of her dance partners, and smiled like a flower in bloom.

\*

The hand that gently met with hers was surprisingly small. When she looked at her next partner, she saw a young man that was about the same height as her, standing there with a grouchy look on his face. He was so beautiful that it made her breath catch, and her reaction was delayed by a second. Puzzled by this handsome young man, who made no effort to hide his displeasure in this auspicious place, she bowed once, and wondered if there had been something that had offended him. She had not seen him earlier, when she had been greeting the guests with her new fiancé.

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“U-um ...”



Not knowing what to say, she tried to find the right words, and while she did, the handsome young man's mood seemed to worsen, and he heaved a huge sigh. With a face that seemed to indicate he'd sighed a year-worth of sighs today, he opened his mouth to speak.

“Why haven't you noticed?”

“ ... ”

“ ... Haa~a ... ”

“ ...! Ah ...? C-could you be ... Rin?”

“ ... Not just 'could be,' I am.”

Appalled that she had been so slow to notice, the handsome young man before her grumbled complaints with a stunned expression. His discontent gaze was somehow captivating, and she couldn't imagine it coming from the usually cheerful and innocent Rin. Rin's emotions were constantly changing, and it was adorable just to watch. However, today, Rin had her brows furrowed

the entire time, giving off an overall displeased aura, and coupled with the slightly loose, ruffled look of her collar, her tiredness had an indescribable attractiveness.

In front of this gorgeous cross dressing, even Miku, who would usually be able to speak without any kind of hesitation, was overwhelmed. Today, Rin was just so ...

“Amazing ...”

“... Eh? Did you say something?”

As the swaying waltz approached the climax, and the crescendo resounded, it seemed that Rin had not been able to hear her.

“Um ... I-it was ... nothing.”

What had she said just now ...? Thinking it over, she started to become embarrassed. But, Rin really did look very attractive today. As she found herself admiring her appearance in fascination, she had forgotten how to even breathe. Rin, who had always

been like a cute younger sister to her, had suddenly been transformed into a boy—and what's more, one so beautiful that anyone would turn back to look at twice; it was no wonder that she was so unsettled. Furthermore, because of the fact that she'd been restlessly moving around since this morning what with the preparations for the banquet and tending to the guests, she was a little tired.

For the time being, she simply watched her elegantly dancing partner, but as usual, Rin was looking around in annoyance. Just what had happened? For some reason, she was wearing those black clothes that she so hated in the fashion of a boy.

“Those clothes ... they really suit you. You look wonderful.”

“... Thanks. Although I'm not that pleased to hear that.”

As she'd thought, she was wearing it against her will. Although it did make her happy that she had

done so to attend the party.

“Um, speaking of which, why are you dressed as a  
—”

Just as she was about to about to ask about her male appearance, she was suddenly pulled close. The slow song had changed to an intense, passionate melody, as if to match Rin’s movements. Startled at the sudden change, she let Rin pull her along and lead the dance.

*She’s acting ... just like a man would ...*

The angel before her had her eyebrows furrowed, and didn’t seem likely to start a conversation herself. Because of her flawless face, like that of a sculpture, and her coldness, she looked like an entirely different person.

*I have to find something to say ...*

The atmosphere was different from usual, and because of that, she felt nervous somehow. As they danced to the intense melody, she frantically tried to

find something to talk about. The song had a faster tempo than the one from before, and although she was barely able to keep up with the difficult steps in her current state, “he” was dancing beautifully, with no wasted movements.

“Umm ... You’re very good at dancing. And the male part, too. How unexpected.”

“... I may look this, but I *have* lived much longer than you, you know.”

As she said this, Rin easily lifted Miku’s body up and spun her around three times. At that moment, voices of admiration rose up all around them. It was a technique that even strong men had trouble pulling off. As always, Rin was dancing with a calm, disgruntled look, but as for her, her face had grown hot again, started by the sudden move. Rin, cute, cheerful and innocent, who she had thought of as a younger sister. And at times, she was also reliable and able to do anything; a wise and mature angel. It was like an entirely different person. She was

convinced that Rin actually had two sides to her. In any case, her increased heartbeat didn't seem like it would be slowing down for a while.

\*

The moon had begun to lower, and the banquet was nearing its end. She stood in a small balcony in one of the guest rooms, quite a distance away from the main hall. Taking off her restricting clothes, she relaxed her wings by flapping them lightly. If she kept her wings folded like that, she'd probably have muscle pains tomorrow. After dancing with Miku, several other women had come up to request a dance with her. She was a little tired from being on the receiving end of such passionate gazes the entire time. Other than when she came to hang out with Miku, she'd never directly talked with humans or anything, so she had been a bit bewildered by the unexpected interactions with so many women. She had been surprised to hear from Lily that she'd been taken for a nobleman, and had been received in good favor by the women.

Enjoying the cool night air, she took a drink from her champagne. Even in Heaven, they had alcohol. Angels drank alcohol, as well, but they didn't become intoxicated. No matter how much they drank, angels didn't lose their reason like humans did.

“Rin! There you are.”

Hearing a familiar voice, she turned to see Miku standing there with a slightly worried face. The banquet still wasn't over, so had she secretly slipped out here?

“... Good work today. Is it alright for the leading star to be loitering out here like this?”

Even though she wasn't and shouldn't be drunk at all, for some reason, she'd taken on a harsh attitude. Would she think that she was in a bad mood this entire time? But, being already used to it, Miku smiled back at her.

“I've already given my general farewells, and besides, everyone will have more fun without me

there. If the hostess is there the entire time, everyone will be too caught up with being courteous to really enjoy themselves.”

“Hmm~ ... I guess so.”

Rin gave a vague response, just to show that she was listening. She had little interest in the subtleties of meticulous expressions or conspiracies that humans had. She hadn't gone out of her way to the human world today to mingle with so many humans.

What she wanted to know was something different.

“Are you ... getting married ... to that person?”

That person. The man that had been by Miku's side for the duration of the banquet. Although it had been her first time talking with him today, he didn't seem like a bad person. In both good ways and bad, he was a normal human. But for some reason, she couldn't ignore the hazy, swirling feelings in her heart. Every time she saw him and Miku getting along, an indescribable discomfort would rise up. In her long life as an angel, it was her first time feeling



this way.

Those bitter feelings may have shown in her expression, as Miku was making a slightly puzzled face.

“We’re still only engaged ... so although we’re not to be officially married just yet ... Mother strongly wishes for the marriage, so I believe that after the party is over, we’ll be discussing it further.”

“... Do you love that person?”

She asked the thing that she wanted to know the most. Although she wasn’t very well-versed on human customs, even an angel understood that marriage was something that took place between two people that loved one another.

“... I’m not sure.”

“You’re not sure, and yet you’re getting married? With someone you might not even love ...!?”

“That’s true ...”

“Wh-why? Don’t you find that strange?”

“If I don’t ... then I won’t be able to live ...”

“... Eh ...?”

“The truth is ... I’m adopted. My real parents passed away a long time ago. And the person who is my mother now is my aunt. Mother married into the family by marrying the former family head, and therefore, we aren’t related by blood. But, ever since my parents passed, she took me in right away, and raised me as her own.”

“I ... see.”

Angels do not reproduce. They are born directly from the Tree of Life. That is why angels have neither parents or siblings. What they have is their mission, and the bonds of their hearts.

However, humans are different. The ones that give birth to humans are other humans. This was why Rin couldn’t really understand what Miku was going through by telling her about these circumstances. But even so—

“If Mother hadn’t been there for me, I would have been alone this whole time ... Because ... my parents, my home, everything ... everything I loved, was burned away that night ...”

“ ... ”

“My parents ... were very wonderful people. I believe they truly loved each other from the bottom of their hearts ... They were wonderful ... That’s why, I dreamed of someday having a wonderful love just like they had.”

“If that’s the case ... Then don’t just rush into a forced marriage ...!”

“But ... The fact that I’m able to live here this mansion ... is all because of Mother. That’s why ... I have to ... meet her expectations ...”

“Expectations ...!? Can you really call that love, then!?”

“Then tell me, Rin, would you betray God!?”

“!”

Staring directly at her with almost accusing eyes, it felt like she'd had her heart caught in her bare hands, and she held her breath.

Betray God? Such a thing had never even crossed her mind.

“The fact that I'm able to live right now is because of Mother. That is why I cannot betray her. Even if, it isn't true love ... I have ... to meet her expectations ... her expectations ...”

Up until now, she had never seen Miku with this kind of expression. She would always smile, no matter what. Looking at her now, and seeing her pain and those eyes that seemed ready to burst into tears at any moment ... it made her chest tighten.

“Hey, Miku ... Do you have someone you love?”

“Eh ...?”

She asked this with her most honest feelings. Miku raised her face at the sudden question, somewhat confused.

“I’ve ... never fallen in love before.”

“... I’m an angel, so I don’t understand human matters very well. But, Lily told me. About how the happiness you find with the person you love ... is the greatest happiness in your lifetime.”

“It’s alright, Rin. Up until now, I’ve been more than happy. Being raised by Mother in this mansion, and being surrounded by so many servants, like Lily and everyone. Always being treated so well by everyone I meet in town. And ...”

Miku softly touched her hand, meeting her gaze.

“And Rin, you’ve always been by my side, as well.”

Behind her truly happy and bright smile, she found the hints of her negative feelings that managed to seep through. Was this the loneliness that she was always hiding?

She had said earlier—“Even if it isn’t true love.”

After losing her beloved parents at a young age, she had been taken and raised to merely be a tool for

continuing the family line, without even being granted true love. Understanding that that was her only value, without complaining, hiding all of her displeasure and painful feelings inside, she still smiled through all of this.

*I want to protect her. I want to, forever...*

“...!”

Before she'd realized, she had kissed her on the spur of the moment. For a second, Miku forgot to even blink, and simply stood still.

Finally snapping back to her senses, she pushed her away forcefully. Caught between surprise, confusion, and embarrassment, Miku stared at her.

“U-umm ...”

With her head in a panic, she knew that she had to say something, but the words wouldn't come out. The one that was most shocked was probably not Miku, but herself.

“Nn ...”

“Ah, wait ...!”

Although she stretched out her hand, it didn't reach, and only grasped the air. Unable to catch up to her as she ran into the mansion, she simply stood there, dumbfounded. Just what had she done? What had been going through her mind when she'd seen her on the verge of tears? It had become completely nighttime by now, and although it should have been silent all around her, all she could hear was the noisy beating of her heart.

## Part 4: Contract

Gentle sunlight illuminated a single branch on the Tree of Life. As a source of holy energy, angels often took breaks here. Rin stretched out on a low, shady branch, taking a brief rest. Lately, it had been busy here in Heaven.

It had been about a year since the demon faith investigation had begun in the Velcant Region. Unable to find any useful information even now, the units put on the mission continued to busily survey the human world daily. In particular, Kaito's unit, which had Velcant under their direct surveillance, was the busiest.

Despite knowing that she would have to switch out for the surveillance again today, for some reason, she couldn't find the motivation at all. It had been like this for a while now. No matter what she did, she'd end up spacing out and staring at the sky, and worrying Kaito, the other members of her unit, and even the most easygoing team in Heaven, Gaku and



Gumi. However, in a time like this, their intuition was somehow sharp, guessing that she had eaten something strange while in the human world. However, unable to figure out the real reason, they could only worry from afar.

“Haa ... Miku ...”

She breathed a heavy sigh, and once again, the same thoughts repeated. Right now, the majority of her thoughts consisted of Miku. Ever since that day, she noticed that Miku’s face would keep flickering in her mind. She had been interested in her since before; a human that she liked so much, she would go out of her way to make time just to meet her in the human world. Nevertheless, she had never thought of her so much that she was unable to work, like what was happening today.

Ever since that day that she had kissed her, she felt like something had changed inside of her. *How will I face Miku? The next time we meet, what should I say to her ...?* In the first place, her personality of not

worrying or thinking deeply about things worked against her; she had the habit of worrying endlessly once she got started. The last time she'd worried this much was when she had separated with "him" — her former partner, twenty years ago.

"Rin!"

Just as she was becoming lost in thought again, she heard someone call her from below. Snapping out of it, she cast her downwards and saw an angel, carrying a large pair of red scissors and a watering can, winking slyly—the stewardess of this tree, Meiko.

"Good timing~ I could use some help right about down. Would you help me out with the pruning?"

"It's not often that I see you come around here. Really, it's been too long."

"Ahaha ... That's true. Since we're in different divisions now."

Holding a pair of scissors that was nearly twice her

height, Rin cut the branch of the apple tree. Normally, it would be the angels assigned under Gabriel that specialized in caring for this tree, so she wasn't sure where and how she should cut. She merely pruned the areas that Meiko had designated earlier.

“How've you been lately~? I heard that you got promoted to a junior angel. If I remember, you were assigned to ... Kaito's unit, right?”

Meiko said this while skillfully swinging the giant watering can to water the plants. She had helped Rin much when she had still been an angel trainee. As one of the finest apple cultivators in Heaven, she had taught Rin the basics of growing apples. While in the human world, they had had a teacher and student relationship. Meiko, who was also an Archangel like Kaito, had treated her very well, but once Rin had officially become a junior angel and gotten busy with work, they didn't meet as much anymore. Being from different units, it wasn't very often at all that they had work together.

“I’m doing surveillance in the human world as part of Kaito’s unit.”

“I see~ That person is the type that’s strict with both himself and others, so it must be tiring, right? Have you gotten used to work already?”

“Yep! I’ve already been working as a pair with Kaito for a while now, so ... I’m in tip-top shape!”

“... Somehow, you look kind of glum. Did something happen?”

Rin was startled when she was asked this. Meiko’s voice sounded worried, but kind. Even though she had tried to act cheerful, Meiko had seen through everything. Perhaps because they had known each other for a long time, she could always easily find out what secrets she was hiding, no matter how trivial.

“ ... ”

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to. I was just a bit worried. When I found you earlier, the face

you were making ... It was the same as back then, that's all ...”

Back then. Back when *he* had Fallen, Meiko had been there to support her then, as well.

“Hey ... Have you ... Do you have interest in humans, Meiko?”

“...?”

“Sorry! That was too sudden ... It's just that, lately, I've been going to the human world often for work ... And, well, I've had opportunities to speak with humans, and ... Yeah.”

“Well ... Speaking from my ‘position,’ humans are a frail existence that need us to watch over them. From the time they are born, until the day they die, to always watching over them—that is the mission of those who protect this tree.”

The Tree of Life, the Grand Tree. This single tree, a huge apple tree that almost seems to form an entire forest, is constantly being watched over and cared

for by angels of Gabriel.

The Tree of Life sustains the circulation of life, and is, so to speak, God's temporary form. The branches bear fruits of the soul, most of which fall to the earth and become the souls of humans.

However, rarely, there are apples that differ from normal apples of the soul, which will shine remarkably and ripen into fruits. These fruits do not fall to the earth, and from them, angels are born.

Furthermore, when a human or angel dies, their soul is returned to this tree again through its roots, and reborn into a new life. Nothing is for certain with this cycle of the circulation of souls; everything happens by chance. A life lost today may be born again somewhere the following day. Or, it may continue to sleep indefinitely inside the warm tree until the time comes. Angels merely provide minimal assistance so ensure that this endless cycle is not delayed.

Yes, simply watching over and nothing more.

“But, I think to myself sometimes. What if ...”

While smiling gently, Meiko patted the trunk of the tree, as if pitying it.

“What if, even if we suddenly stopped caring for this tree, it still ... Humans were still born, as they are now, and die, as they do now?”

“ ...”

“What if humans aren’t as weak as we believe them to be? ... Rather, despite being so frail, and simple ... and living such fleeting lives compared to us, they shine and do the best that they can ... What if they’re much stronger than us, angels? ... Keep it a secret from everyone that I’ve said this though, alright?”

It would be a controversial statement coming from the Archangel leading the tending of this tree. In Heaven, it was always regarded that, without the help of angels, humans would not be able to properly live nor die. It was a problem dealing with the meaning of the existence of angels.

“Okay ... Meiko, do you ever think about wanting to come in contact with humans?”

“Hmm ... Since I spend every day with their ‘souls’ like this, I wouldn’t dare to go to the human world and come in contact with their ‘containers.’ I believe that I’m already in contact with them enough as it is now.”

“I see ...”

“Are you interested in any human in particular, Rin?”

“Eh ... U-umm ...”

Rin, who was breaking the law of interacting with a human more than what was necessary, had suddenly just now become embarrassed.

“Fufu. You don’t have to hide it. I won’t tell anymore. And, anyway ... You’re not the only one.”

“Eh ...?”

“You’re not the only angel that’s shown more interest than they should in humans ... Since long



before, there's been many angels that are the same way."

"R-really ...?"

"... This is also something that's kept a secret from the younger ones, but ..."

'Younger ones' meant angels under the age of three hundred years old.

"Before, both Heaven and the human world were in much disarray. The distance between angels and humans used to be closer, and the laws didn't used to be as strict as they are now. That was, until the Great War happened ..."

"...!"

"Do you know about 'The Legendary Angel'?"

"Umm ... The one that played an active role in the Great War?"

At the Gran Dios Temple, during the time of the Oracle. A large, golden portrait of a woman adorned that sacred place. She was the savior of the war five

hundred years prior, with invincible strength. All angels aspire to be like her at some point in their lives.

“Yes, the Legendary, Golden Angel. You know ... Even *she* Fell to the earth of her own accord.”

“!!”

“Surprised ...? Even she, who is said to be the Scripture of Angels. That’s why it’s not such an unnatural thing for angels to be interested in humans. Don’t you think so? After all, they’re the ‘lives’ that we risk our own lives to protect. Ah ... Keep everything I’ve told you a secret from everyone else, alright?”

Her heart had been beating so noisily since a while ago. Rin nodded vigorously, swearing to keep it all a secret, absolutely. Meiko held a finger to her lips as she laughed; it must have only been Rin’s imagination that her eyes seemed to waver a bit with loneliness.

Ever after consulting Meiko about humans ... in

other words, her ambiguity towards Miku, Rin still hadn't made much progress on her feelings. Although she was relieved to learn that being interested humans wasn't a negative thing, that was exactly what made it bad that she, as an angel, couldn't stop thinking about a certain human to the point that she was barely able to do her work. Her direct superior, Kaito, was soft on her, and had told her not to hesitate to talk with him if she had something on her mind. However, since Kaito was of the Ira Faction, which didn't think too highly of humans, there was no way she could possibly discuss the matters about Miku with him, and so time had passed with an awkwardness remaining between them.

It would soon be about one month since she had last met with Miku. For angels, one month was barely any time at all, but for humans, one month should be long enough for a major event to blow over and cool down.

Within this changeover period for the demon faith

surveillance, she would once more have to be in the human world every day for work for the time-being. With these dallying, unpleasant emotions revived, she prepared to descend. As soon as the takeover work ended today, she would go to meet her right away. She didn't plan to do anything once she did, though. She just wanted to apologize for suddenly kissing her, and be honest about the feelings she had right now—

Her heavy flapping felt a little lighter, and spreading out her wings, she headed towards the land below.

“My apologies~ She should be returning either tomorrow or the day after.”

It had been a while since Rin had visited the Cyrintpt Mansion.

Due to bad timing, Miku had currently stepped out, and Lily, who was keeping her company, had brewed some tea for her. As usual, the tea that she brewed was delicious.

“And? It's been quite a while since I've seen you last.

Is work busy~?”

“Yeah ... I ... guess so.”

She answered vaguely, as if she were deceiving her. It was true that it was a busy work period, but because her thoughts were full of Miku rather than work, she felt a guilty conscience somehow.

“I see~ Lady Miku doesn’t seem like herself these days, so I wondered if something had happened between the two of you. Ever since that day, you’ve stopped coming as frequently as you used to, after all.”

“ugh— ... *guh, ackk*”

“My! Are you alright?”

Rin looked at Lily, who was sitting across from her, as she choked on the Darjeeling tea that she had been drinking. For some reason ... Behind her worried expression, she felt like Lily was looking at her with a kind of gleeful curiosity.

“Nevertheless, your reactions are quite easy to

understand, Lady Rin~”

“B-be quiet.”

She was often teased by the other angels for not being able to lie or keep secrets, but recently, even Miku and Lily had started to tease her.

“And, so ...? Did you and Lady Miku have an argument?”

“... We didn’t.”

“Then ... Did you say something to make things turn sour between you two?”

“... I ... don’t think ... I have?”

“... Why do you sound unsure?”

“... That’s because ...”

Just as Rin was about to say, “Because I don’t understand human emotions,” she shut her mouth.

She had nearly forgotten that Lily didn’t know that she was an angel. Right now, Rin was adjusting her power so that she could be seen as an ordinary

human like Lily, and hiding her wings from view. Here, she had been given the identity of a freewheeling noble living in the neighboring country. Because of the fact that she was always so natural around them, she had almost forgotten for a moment.

“Ah— ... It’s because ... Miku said she was getting married ... all of a sudden.”

“Life is always sudden, full of ups and down; but tomorrow is always another day! No one knows what is in store ... That, is romance.”

Just what was Lily imagining as she said this, with her cheeks slightly reddened?

“No, what I mean is ...”

“In other words!”

Pointing across the table with her index finger and posing like a detective that had just figured out a case, Lily spoke.

“I don’t like it ... That Lady Miku is thinking of

marriage, before even consulting me about it!”

“Uu ...”

“Aaah ... Even though we’ve always gotten along with no secrets between us ...”

“Uuu ...”

“And yet ... And yet ...! Before I’d noticed, she’s become so friendly with *that* kind of man ...!”

“Uuu ...”

“What a traitorous act! Now that it’s come to this~ I’ll kill you, and then kill myself—!”

“That’s overdoing it.”

Rin chopped Lily’s head as she began rambling like an actor with dramatic gestures. Lily rubbed her head, even though it was obvious that it didn’t hurt.

“But, that’s how you feel, correct?”

“ ... ”

“I’ll take your silence as an affirmative~”



“... N-not so much ... that I’d want to kill her.”

“... That was only a joke. You’re surprisingly radical, Lady Rin. Hmm~ I see~ ... Hmmm ...”

“*What ...?*”

“Oh, it’s nothing. And, what do you intend to do, Lady Rin?”

“...? Intend ... to do?”

“Umm, as in ... Do you want to prevent Lady Miku’s marriage?”

“P-prevent it!? No, I ... Besides, she said it still hasn’t even been finalized yet ...”

“Eh? Ah, speaking of which, while Lady Rin was absent, it’s been formally settled~ If memory serves correctly ... the ceremony will take place next month~”

“!! I ... I see ...”

She couldn’t hide her shock at Lily’s words.

“Will you be attending the wedding?”

“... I don’t want to go.”

“... Is that so ... But I ...”

All of her sudden, Rib’s vision was blinded by an ominous black.

“—went to the trouble of preparing you a new outfit to wear for the wedding ...”

Lily acted as if she were breaking down into sorrow, and let out a loud, dejected sigh. In the end, what mattered most to her was that the new outfit had all gone to waste.

“I’ve, already, told you! I’m never wearing black again!”

“But it’s a wedding! *Everyone* will be dressed in all black! You know?”

“ ...”

“The outfit you wore at the banquet last time suited you *oh so well*. You were monopolizing *all* of the gazes from the young lady guests~”

“Huuuh~?”

“Oh my, you noticed, didn’t you? You really are so sinful~ Without knowing it was a cross dress, all the girls were falling head over heels for you! How impure~! Ah, but that dangerous aura is rather ... Well, putting that aside ... After all, Lady Rin has eyes only for Lady Miku~”

Cross dress— Since she normally looked like a girl, then that was probably about right.

“... I wonder if I’ve made a mistake, after all ...”

As Lily made fun of her, Rin muttered to herself. For humans, the usual couple consisted of a man and a woman, for the sake of reproduction. Although, every once in a while, she would heard about two same-gendered people that loved each other ... But, even so, it was strange like she, an angel that appeared to be a girl, was interested in a human that was also female, like she was.

Or did the problem lie in the fact that angels and humans weren’t compatible?

“Eh?”

“... Ah, no, it’s nothing. Don’t mind it.”

Although her feelings should have been sorted out a bit after talking with Meiko, she felt them grow heavy once more.

“... I don’t think you’re mistaken at all.”

“Eh?”

When she lifted her face at the sound of a voice, she saw that Lily had come to her side, smiling at her almost pitifully.

“The most important thing ... is the quality of the soul. After all, appearances are nothing more than the ‘container’ which holds the soul.”

“...! That’s ...”

It was ... almost as if “they” were the same —

“At the banquet, you were all by yourself, weren’t you~? You spoke with Lady Miku in secret, didn’t you~?”

“... Haa ... You have some hellish ears yourself.”

One day, Rin would return those words right back at the person before her. For a brief moment, she had panicked, thinking that Lily had seen through to her true identity. Despite being a human, sometimes the things she said surprised her. Although, those words always helped her in some way ...

“You should live how you want to, and be true to your own feelings. After all, you only live once.”

Saying this as she smiled, you wouldn't think that she had seen telling stupid jokes just a moment ago. Right now, Lily seemed even more aged and solemn than Rin, who was over one hundred and fifty years old.

Finishing Lily's tea, Rin slowly flew the way back to Heaven. Despite the fact that she'd been so excited to come, in the end, the person she'd wanted to see wasn't there, leaving her feeling disappointed. Although she had received some courage after talking with Lily, if they met now, she would be lost

on what to say. It might've been a good thing that they hadn't been able to meet today, then. However, deciding that she wouldn't see her again had never been an option since the start. Nothing good would come out of continuing to run like this. She'd come back tomorrow. And then—

“Fancy meeting you again in a place like this!”

Still, she didn't know what she should say. First of all, she would probably apologize for what had happened last month.

“O~i! Can you hear me~?”

But how should she even apologize? Just suddenly say, “I'm sorry!” ...?

“Heeey.”

All of a sudden, her left arm was grabbed with a strong force, surprising her.

“What're you spacing out for? Something troubling you~?”

Turning around, Rin saw the red-haired demon that

she had fought with before, smiling just as casually as he had before. For a moment, she was unable to respond to this sudden situation, but after a pause, she tried to free her arm. However, his grip was too tight, and she wasn't able to resist. This demon was much stronger than her. She remembered how she had been overwhelmed by his strength in their previous battle.

—If she couldn't win by strength, she had no choice but to try negotiating with him.

“Oh? You're quiet today~ Have you finally learned that I'm the stronger one here?”

“... tch. What are you after?”

It was frustrating that she couldn't say anything back, but this opponent's level was above average. She couldn't act recklessly like last time and cause trouble for everyone again.

“Hmm ... It's not like I called out to you because I was after anything. I just see you from time to time when I go on a stroll.”

“... Even demons ... take strolls, huh?”

“... pfft—”

“...?”

“Ahhahahaha—”

The demon suddenly burst into a laughing fit. Laughing while holding his stomach, he looked so much different than how she knew demons to be like—cruel and cunning.

“Wh-what’s so funny!?”

“Ahhaha ... Aah~ Oh, no, no. It’s just that, it seems like you’re misunderstanding us.”

“Misunderstanding!? About what!?”

“Even if you lump all of us demons together, there’s both good guys and bad guys among us.”

“...! What ... What’re you trying to say!?”

“It’s the same in your precious Heaven, isn’t it—? Angels have various different personalities, too.”

“tch ...”



“There’re ones like you: genuine, pure, and cute angels. And then there’re angels that do terrible things, *far* worse than the acts of demons, under the guise of holy power, right?”

“Wh ...! Don’t speak nonsense!”

“I’m *not*. And anyway ... Demons originated from fallen angels, you know?”

Hearing those words, her body stiffened, rendering her unable to move.

Demons ... came from angels?

“Well, I guess that kind of thing doesn’t really matter. Demons, or angels. And anyway ...”

The demon released his grip on her slightly and peered at her face.

“Did something happen? You’ve become a lot meeker than the last time we met.”

“... It has nothing to do with you.”

“Hmm ... What? Did you have an argument with a

human?”

“...!!”

Even though it was a demon that had said it, his words made her snap her head up.

“Huh, bull’s eye? My intuition is pretty sharp~ Probably because I’m a demon, I guess. People’s secrets ... Because it’s part of yin, the dark force, I’ve always been able to see them quite well.”

“ ...”

“It really is all over your face. Sort of like, you’re completely guilty about something? Ah, could it be that you’ve fallen in love with a human boy?”

“!!”

“Ah— ... I was just joking, but was I actually right?”

“... tch.”

Even though she wanted to deny it, the words wouldn’t come out. If it was this demon with the good intuition, any explanation she came up with

would be seen right through in the end.

“Ah, well ... What a shame. You’re pretty cute, so I was going for you.”

Rin pulled her gun out and quickly aimed it.

“Hey, wait~ What’re you getting angry for!?”

“Don’t mess with me!”

“I’m not~ I quite like angels, since they’re cute.

When it comes to angels, blonde hair and blue eyes is the ideal, right? And you look just like one—the perfect angel.”

“That’s prejudiced!”

“Is it? The Legendary Angel of old, it was said that she was a beautiful girl with blonde hair and blue eyes, wasn’t she?”

“... That has ... nothing to do with it right now.”

Although she planned to fire the gun with brute force, because the demon had a grip on her right arm, she couldn’t put any strength into it.

“Woah, that was close! You can’t kill me, you know~? Anyway, I don’t think it’d be a good idea for you to kill me.”

Saying this as he easily put up with her resistance, he grinned; the next words to leave his mouth sounded sweet and seductive.

“Don’t you want to know ...? How to capture that human for your own.”

There were inside an aging cathedral on the outskirts of town. After moving the stone monument embedded beneath the altar, it revealed a dim, underground tunnel. Relying on the few lit candles on the walls, they descended the dark, dark staircase. Without a single turn, the path continued in a straight line. The dark stairs gave off an eerie feel, as if they continued all the way down to Hell. Rin stared at the back of the demon that walked in front of her.

Close to Rulen Island, the center of Alphine, was the small island of Minole. The center island, Rulen, and

the surrounding islands, each had their own politics, and even Rulen, which was the center of the government, couldn't interfere much with the governing of other islands. This was due to the fact that once, long ago, the nobles that had been active in establishing the Kingdom of Alphine had brought together individual politics into the land, and for that reason, each island's culture was slightly different.

The island that the demon had taken her to, Minole, was a small island to the northwest of Rulen, with a population of a mere fifty thousand. Because they usually did surveillance patrols in Alphine, Rin had flown to his island several times before, but it was her first time seeing the place they were in now. Could a demon's hideout actually have been in a place like this? Perhaps due to anxiety, her heart had been pounding since earlier. It would be her first time setting foot into the lair of the enemy—and one that was clearly stronger than her, at that. Finally, they saw the end of the seemingly endless

staircase. The demon walking ahead of her stepped down, and opened the door that lay ahead. It made an unpleasant creaking sound as it opened.

“Yo. Granny, you in here?”

Once Rin was through the door that the demon had led her to, inside, an odd scene spread out before her. All the walls of the wide interior were lined with bookshelves that were crammed up high with books. The ceiling was so high up that it wouldn't be seen from where they were. In the center of the room was a large desk, and around it, machines that looked like laboratory equipment, emitted low noises as they operated. Just seeing all the rows of animal bones, creepy-looking plants, and suspiciously-colored fluids made her want to leave.

Just as she was standing there bewildered, an old lady emerged from a door at the back that seemed to connect to the next room.

“... My, my, so it's you, is it? What is it, at this hour?”

The old lady, who looked just a “witch” from a

storybook, looked over in their direction with an annoyed expression. Although her appearance was rather unsightly, she wasn't a demon, but an ordinary human. Although, because it seemed the old lady could naturally see the true forms of angels and demons, it was hard to say that she was ordinary.

When their eyes met, a nasty smile crept onto the old lady's face.

"Oh, what have we here ... It's been a while since I've seen an angel in the flesh."

"She's cute, isn't she?"

"Ah, yes ... Quite adorable, she is ..."

There was something insulting and criticizing about her face when she laughed about her being cute.

"Now then ... What business do you have here, young lady?"

As she swirled a reddish brown flask that sat on top of the desk, the old lady spoke.

“ ... ”

Unable to answer, the demon beside her soon came to Rin's aid.

“You mentioned it before, right? A love potion. That's what we're here for.”

“A love potion ... Have I ever made such a thing ...?”

“You have, haven't you~? Have you already forgotten, Granny...?”

“That is no way to speak to the elderly! In any case, a potion I've made once cannot be made again.”

“Haa~~!? What's with that unreasonable pickiness?”

“You had best give up on it ...”

“What the hell ... Ah~ ... Well, what're ya gonna do?”

The demon glanced in Rin's direction. He was making a disappointed face, as if going out of his way to introduce her had all been for nothing.

“It's not like ... I need anything like a love potion. And besides ...”



And besides ... Why would she make Miku drink a love potion? That made it seem like she was in love with Miku. And on top of being lured in, it was a disgrace that she had consulted and was being helped by a demon, the enemy.

“Hmm. Young lady, it would seem that your worries are rather complicated ... I sense the hint of a taboo.”

The moment Rin heard the word, “taboo,” her heartbeat sped up.

“Huh ... taboo, eh? Scary, scary.”

As a suspicious glint flashed in the demon’s eye, he waved both hands.

“Are you one to speak ...? Demons are truly terrible beings. Letting others’ trust in them seep into their hearts, and by the time they notice, they’re descending down the stairs to the abyss together.”

As the old lady bantered at the demon, she faced Rin again.

“Young lady, this is becoming a complicated

conversation. If you do not wish to hear it, I would advise you leave.”

“? Wh-what do you mean ...?”

“Do you truly like that human so much?”

“! Wh-wha ...”

Here it was again. Just like when the demon had guessed what she was thinking, could even this old lady see through her?

“... Ah— I’ll be leaving now. I’ll let you two take your time now.”

With just that, the demon turned to leave.

“Eh...! W-wait!”

In a panic, Rin called after him. Had he brought her all this way just to introduce her to an old lady?

“Well, don’t work yourself too hard over it. If you’ll become one of ‘us,’ you’re welcome anytime.”

And with that, he disappeared beyond the door.

Although he said “us,” this old lady was a human, so

what could he have meant by that?

“It would seem that he brought you here because he’s interested in you. However, it doesn’t necessarily mean he’s thinking of taking you in.”

“B-but ...”

“For the most part, demons are fickle. Well, regardless of his appearance, he’s a meddlesome one, and prone to changing his mind halfway. Incidentally ...”

Studying her from head to toe, this human should have been much younger than she was, but for some reason, Rin felt strangely nervous around her.

“What is your name?”

“Um, it’s ... Rin.”

Surprisingly, the old lady asked such a thing. Seeing as how she was an acquaintance of the demon from earlier, and wasn’t surprised to see an angel, it would seem that she was a human that knew a great deal about “this world.”

“Rin ... hmm?”

“Um, and you are?”

“Even my own name has been forgotten long ago.”

“... I think I’m still much older than you, though ...”

It wasn’t her appearance, but it was like this person, who somehow gave off the feeling of being much older than she was, was holding some secrets.

“Rin, why have you come here?”

“... H-he brought me here.”

“That is not what I asked. I’m asking, why were you tempted by him? Are you that foolish of an angel?”

“ ... ”

Rin was stunned by those words. It was frustrating to admit, but it seemed that the other was rather skilled. And, for some reason, when she spoke to this person, she was seized by a strange temptation of wanting to tell her the true feelings that she had told no one else.

“... There’s someone I’m interested in. Ah, well ... she’s a human girl, though.”

“Hmm ... In Heaven, there should be a rule that prohibits angels to become involved with a specific human.”

“...! Ah, that’s why, um ...”

Just as she said this, she started to feel the guilt gnawing at her.

“Wait, that’s simply what the law dictates. There are many angels that have left Heaven because they oppose of such an absurd law.”

“...!! Y-you know about that?”

“... Well, of those I know, there have been several.”

Suddenly, Rin remembered the face of her partner that she had separated from twenty years ago. Perhaps he was also an acquaintance of this old lady ...

“The last time I saw an angel was forty years ago. Ever since then, I haven’t heard about any fallen

angels ... I've heard that recently, the laws in Heaven have become stricter."

"... T-that's ... true ..."

He had Fallen twenty years ago ... in that case, she wouldn't know about it. Rin was a bit dismayed at this.

"Tell me now, the human you are infatuated with, what does she think of you? To begin with, can she even see your true form?"

"... Ah, um ... Miku ... saved me. One year ago, I happened to get into a fight with that demon from earlier ... I got injured, and was unable to return to Heaven, but ... She—Miku, happened to pass by, and asked me if I'd rest at her home, and I became indebted to her ..."

"I see ... In other words, it was love at first sight, hm?"

"N-no, you're wrong! At that time, I didn't ..."

"Then why did you decide to go along with a human

girl whom you had just met ...? No matter how serious an injury, angels have ways to heal themselves.”

“... That’s, because ... it was my first time speaking with a human ... And, I thought it was unusual. For her to be able to see my true form, just like you’re able to ...”

“... In that case, if I had happened to pass by at that time, and held out a hand to you, would you have come along with me without a second thought ...?”

“No way! Definitely not! ... Ah.”

“You’re an honest one. But more than anything, that is your proof.”

The beating of her heart was the answer to the old lady’s words.

“But, if you say love at first sight, then ...”

“It began from love at first sight, and after much time passed, those feelings became certain. That is what love is.”

“... I-is this ... really love ...?”

These were the feelings that she didn't want to admit. Angels do not love. They aren't allowed to. The only thing that they have is affection. Rin had heard that love was a strong emotion that meant devoting your entire self to another. However, that emotion is prohibited for angels that live for their mission and for “God,” and no matter how close angels might be to one another, the one that takes the highest priority is “God.” The angels that cannot do so are treated as heretics, and subjected to reeducation.

“Although you may not understand it, it is not impossible. Angels do not love, correct? However, you have realized what it is. Simply accepting it is enough. Now then, there are two paths that lie before you.”

“... Two ... paths ...?”

Since a while ago, due to the old lady's skillful speaking ability, Rin could now only vaguely repeat



her words.

She was so drawn in this time that it was inevitable.

“Yes. The first is ... In accordance to the law, your soul will be reduced once more to the source of life; that which is called the Tree of Life, in Heaven. There, your current ‘unnecessary’ memories and emotions will all be removed, and you will be reborn with a clean state as ‘Rin.’”

“...!! Th-that’s ...”

“Were you not aware? Since long before, angels that have become heretics would have their unnecessary memories taken away, and their souls reset. However, at the very least, their lives are left intact. They are merciful in that aspect.”

“... I’ve never heard about heretics or anything my entire life ...”

“Not a surprise. From the looks of it, you still seem young. Those in power tend to keep the darker parts behind closed doors. Well, that is the same both in

Heaven and in these lands.”

“!!”

Rin couldn't say that she wasn't unfamiliar with this. Every few years, there would be an angel that would mysteriously become amnesiac after disappearing during a mission. However, she would always hear about how it was due to a battle with a demon, or due to an accident because of their own carelessness, and neither she nor anyone around her felt that that there was anything unusual.

An unpleasant sweat rolled down her back.

“In any case, if your infatuation with a human is discovered, you will meet that same fate. However, that is dependent on you. If you don't want to be exposed, then you should cut off any future contact with that human. It is that simple.”

“ ... ”

“... Perhaps I'm teasing you a bit too much. If those feelings could be so easily forgotten, so many angels

would not have Fallen to these lands up until this day.”

“...! Fallen angels ...”

“To Fall ... That is the second path. Most angles that have Fallen do so because of love. Although rare, there are those that have done for other reasons ...”

Fallen angels. The most traitorous act against God and Heaven. That was what those that abandoned their mission as an angels and Fall to the earth are called.

“Although they’re all called fallen angels ... there are several kinds. There are those that have made contracts with demons and dyed their wings black ... and those that remain as angels, seal their power, and live in hiding ... Although most form contracts with demons and convert their holy power to dark power ... If not, they’ll soon be discovered by Heaven. And then, there’s ...”

“...?”

“Humans ... Those that wish to live among humans wish to blend in as naturally as possible in the human world. That is why they rely on my help. On ‘us,’ who, although human, possess powers—extraordinary powers.”

“... Eh ...?”

“But, that has little relevance. I’ve said that in the past, there have been several angels that came to me wanting to live in the human world, yes?”

“Yeah.”

“Living in the human world while avoiding detection from Heaven is quite difficult to do. It isn’t something that can be accomplished with one’s own power. First, in order to not be found by Heaven, one’s holy energy must be completely sealed. ... However, angels without any holy energy ... No, it’s the same for humans—they will, inevitably die.”

“... O-of course they will.”

“After you die, then all is lost ... However, there are

two ways to live while sealing one's power. ... The first is to pair one's holy power with dark power ... To use the power that demons possess. By forming a contract with a specific demon, use their ability to change one's holy power into dark power. In other words, become a demon."

"... A ... demon ..."

"Well, your appearance would not go through much change."

" ... "

"The other way is ... to use this."

The old lady reached over to the cupboard beside the desk and pulled out an aging and tattered scale.

"A scale ...?"

It appeared to be a scale, however, it had only one dish.

"This is called the Scale of Judgment. In exchange for granting one wish of the user, something of equal value is sacrificed in order to balance the scale."

“What ... does that mean ...?”

“Ahh ... Allow me to explain. Suppose that you have a wish that you want granted, no matter the cost. In that case, you would wish on this scale. However ... The moment that wish is granted, you will experience the happiness you have acquired and at the same time, an equal amount of sadness. In other words, it will even out. —The person that used this previously was a man that that wanted to cure his wife who had a life-threatening disease. He knew of the heavy risks that the scale held, but still, his feelings of wanting to his wife were stronger. With the power of the scale, his wife became perfectly well again. However, from that day on, she no longer loved her husband. Losing his wife, and being loved by her, were equal in value to him. And as for his fate ... For him, his wife was his only reason to live. After being abandoned by his wife, he left his final words of grief, and took his own life ...”

“ ... ”

“That is the kind of tool it is. If you were to use this scale, what would you wish for? And what would you give up? ... Now then, which path will you follow?”

Which path ... Should she be faithful to God, and throw away all of her “unnecessary memories” and be reborn as an angel? Or should she betray God and Heaven, and Fall to the earth to escape ...?

Should she become a demon, or a human?

“ ... ”

“Well, I’m sure you’re conflicted. Although, even if your memories are erased in Heaven, it is only of the things concerning the one you loved. You won’t lose everything.”

“My memories ... I don’t want ... to lose my memories I’ve made with Miku ...”

“... I’ve had my assumptions when you arrived here. What is it that you want?”

“... I don’t want to forget my memories of Miku!

Definitely not ... But, I can't ... betray Heaven ... or Kaito and everyone ...”

“A selfish girl, aren't you? You cannot have everything in life.”

“But—“

“... From my point of view, I can already see the answer within you.”

“...!!”

“The ‘soul’ is always truthful. Because of this, it is most painful to live while lying to oneself.”

“... What ... should I do ...”

“For what purpose do you want to live for?”

Rin had been asked this same thing once before. She remembered the words that he, who had Fallen, had said on that day.

“I ... I ...”

With her head in a panic, she couldn't find the



words.

“Keep calm. Close your eyes and breathe slowly. Understood? Try to recall of memories of happy times, sad times, and kind feelings. ... Now, what do you see there?”

Just as the old lady told her to, Rin shut her eyes and took slow breathes. Happy memories flooded into her mind: When she grew apples with Gumi and Meiko and everyone. Delicious apples. They brought them to Gaku, and although she seemed a bit displeased, they enjoyed tea time with Luka. They always talked about many things, and she would think of silly pranks and he would get mad at her ... Kaito. He had made fun of her, saying that there's never been an angel that fell out of a tree, despite having wings. Even when she made mistakes during her work, he would kindly give his support while lecturing her. They had flown through the skies together ... Just as she had done with *him*, who was no longer here. He, blue-eyed and kind—they would ditch work together, and think of pranks to pull on

Kaito. They were so kind. Everyone was so kind, and warm.

And yet—

When Rin opened her eyes, tears had started flowing.

“... That which you thought of just now ... There is your answer.”

“... I ... Kai ... to ... everyone ... I’m ... so sorry.”

Because of the tears that flowed freely now, as if from an open dam, the old lady’s face before her appeared faintly blurred. The next thing she knew, the old lady’s wrinkled hand was patting her head gently. The warmth from her hand was so gentle that she could no longer stop the tears from falling.

“Why ... how ...”

“... Worry not. Who is to tell you that that ‘answer’ is a wrong one?”

In some roundabout way, those words gave her relief, and she could no longer stop the feelings that

she had kept in the depths of her heart from overflowing now. She had always been terrible at lying.

Those gentle and warm days. Her proud mission as an angel. So many of those precious, irreplaceable memories lined up, but they wavered in the face of that smile from that day, when *she* reached a hand out towards her.

*I have Fallen for her.*

What Rin took from the old lady was the contract—gold lettering on jet black paper.

Rin knocked modestly against the window. The Cyrinpt Mansion was very quiet in the middle of the night, mostly due to the fact that everyone besides the night-shift servants were asleep. Miku's room was in the corner of the third floor that received much sunlight during the day, and whenever she came only to see her, Rin would always come to the window of this room. It had already been one year since Miku promised to always open it for her when

she knocked.

Rin waited for a while, and when there was no response, she tried knocking once more. If she still didn't answer after this, then she'd just give up. Perhaps she'd already gone to bed ... Or perhaps ... If she was being ignored—

Just as she was starting to get discouraged with negative thoughts, the window suddenly opened, causing her to fly upwards as a reflex. Miku was looking over at her with a slightly surprised expression.

“U-um ...”

It had been one month since that banquet ... Although for angels, one month should feel like only a moment, why did it feel like so much time had passed? And, now that the face of the person that had never left her mind during that period was before her, she didn't even know what to say. It was so pathetic. As Rin stuttered while desperately trying to find the words, it was Miku that spoke up

first.

“I apologize for last time.”

“Eh?”

“It was so sudden, so I was surprised ...”

“Ah ... U-um, about that ...”

“It was ... like a social gesture, right ...?”

“Eh ...?”

“You said before that the culture for angels is different from the culture here. It seemed that I completely forgot about something so obvious. For us, that kind of thing is done between lovers, but ... I remembered how you said for angels, everything is based on affection ... You kissed me because you and I are friends, despite me being a human. And yet, I was surprised, and ran away from you ...”

“Ah ... Y-yeah.”

Rin couldn't say anything more than that. For some reason ... Her chest hurt like her heart was breaking.

It felt so painful that tears threatened to form.

An angel's kiss was a proof of blessing. There were no romantic feelings involved, but simply affection. Although Miku had only made up that "culture" on her own, it was actually completely right.

But ... that kiss had been ...

Rin wanted to deny it in a loud voice, saying that that she was wrong, but after they had finally been able to talk, a part of her was very afraid of making her upset again. Smiling softly as she suppressed the conflicts within her heart, Miku leaned against the balcony rail and spoke up after collecting her thoughts.

"It's ... been officially decided that I'm to be married to Mr. Iceburg. Have you already heard from Lily ...?"

"Yeah ... She told me ... the other day."

She had heard from Lily, but to hear it from Miku herself—somewhere in her heart, Rin was begging

to be saved. *If only she would change her mind ...* Ever since she had realized her love for Miku, she felt like everything changed to accommodate her desires. Those murky emotions stirred. She wished that she could monopolize everything about her ... These feelings—how greedy they were. Love was such a selfish and foul thing.

“Miku ... Are you really fine with that ...?”

Hiding her own filthy feelings, Rin spoke only words that made it seem like she was worried about her.

“... I’ve said so before. I have something very important to me, and I can’t betray that.”

“Is that for your family? For your mother’s sake? For everyone’s sake?”

“... I ... suppose. It would be ... for everyone’s sake.”

“... Then ... Miku ... What about your own sake? Who lives for your sake, Miku?”

“Th-that’s ...”

“That Iceburg person—To me, it doesn’t seem like

he really loves you at all! Just like the other nobles, he only has his own interests in mind!”

“...!!”

“Miku, you’re always ... *always* only thinking of other people! You never think of fulfilling your own happiness! Is that okay? Are you really fine with that?”

She couldn’t stop the words from spilling out. Who was she to say this? Up until a moment ago, she had only been thinking about how she didn’t want Miku to hate her, so how could she —

“Humans’ lives are short, you know? Compared to how much time angels have, it really is a blink of an eye! But even so ... Putting up with things you don’t like, holding in all of your true feelings ... from now ... until the day you die ... Living for the sake of those around you ... That’s just so ...”

She wanted to say how sad it was, but the words stuck in her throat. The girl before her was trembling with a very hurt expression. Rin had



uncovered the feelings that Miku had always kept locked away in her heart, unwilling to reveal them to anyone. In a moment, her eyes blurred over with tears. Despite the timing, Rin thought her expression looked very beautiful.

“I... I ...”

Holding back the tears until they finally spilled over, Miku shouted with her true feelings:

“In reality ... I want to live freely! I want ... to fall in love ...! I want friends! ... I don't want to study all the time, but to have fun, too! ... I wanted someone to praise me ... saying that I've done well! Whenever I was sad, I wanted someone to hold me! I just ... I just wanted to be loved, without being asked for anything in return ...!”

Along with her sorrowful cries, the tears continued to stream down her cheeks without stopping. To think that she, who was always smiling, was hiding such powerful emotions. Rin embraced her thin, frail body.

“When it’s too hard, you can cry ... Because I’ll let you cry.”

“Rin ...”

“You’re important to me, Miku.”

“ ...”

“I’ll be your side ... Always.”

“ ...”

“I’ll always ... be by your side and protect you.”

“ ...”

Miku didn’t say anything. She simply continued to cry in sobs. The moment Rin saw her tears, she realized it. She was convinced now that her feelings weren’t unusual, and that they weren’t heresy or anything wrong.

*I’ve found it. That which you spoke of ... Although it’s taken me so long, I think I finally understand.*

“For what purpose do you think ‘life’ exists?”

*I’m certain that it is meant to be used, for someone else’s*

sake.

The Claude Cathedral, bathed in twilight. This most remarkably regal cathedral among the buildings in the human world—when was the first time that I’d come here? This was also the place that I had first met *her*.

Miku—

You, a human, will go so much sooner than I, an angel. And, one day, I’ll be in a world where you no longer exist.

Ever since I met her, my world has changed. The world which I thought was colorful and rich, shone increasingly brighter, and because of her, these eyes reflected pure white to pitch black, and so many vivid colors in between.

In my right hand was a gun.

And what I aimed at, was a single apple.

Juicy and emitting a sweet scent, “my soul,” that was slightly overripe, would soon rot. It was written in

the contract that I had received from the old lady:  
“Place the vessel for your soul on one side of the  
scale, and make your wish.”

I want to become a human. That’s why I’ve decided  
to sever my soul as an angel. No matter what I lose  
in exchange for my wish. No matter what happens  
to me, as long as I can be by her side as a human, I  
can tolerate any pain.

“Goodbye ...”

I didn’t know who those words were for. The one I  
was parting with was the angel, Rin, and that life. In  
the back of my mind, gentle smiles flickered. My  
comrades in Heaven, my superiors, and—

As if to cut off those feelings, I pulled the trigger.

Countless stark white feathers danced upwards into  
the wide sky.

*What pretty wings ...* Only the smile of the one who  
had said this remained etched into the back of my  
eyelids.

Her heart was suddenly taken by a tightening pain, stopping her breath. The man beside her, the son of the Iceburg family, looked over at her in wonder.

“What’s wrong, Miku? Are you feeling unwell?”

“... Ah, no, not at all. It’s just ... my chest starting hurting a little.”

“That’s not good. Let us go see a doctor at once.”

“Ah, I’m fine, so please don’t mind it.”

“But, if my angel were to fall ill, I wouldn’t be able to live with the grief.”

“Angel ...”

An angel ... She turned to look out the window. If angels really existed, would they be flying freely with their wings through this sky?

“If ... I were to meet an angel ...”

Beside her, after hearing that she was fine, he had immediately started to look through outfits again.

“I’d want to fly with them through this vast sky.”

“Hahah. You say such cute things. But, don’t actually fly away. I’ll become lonely.”

“... Oh, Mr. Iceburg.”

“Speaking of which, that ring—”

“Eh?”

“It seems like you treasure it very much, but ... I’d like it if you would wear for me this engagement ring that I’ve bought.”

“...!!”

The viscount slowly took out a small box from his breast pocket, and fit onto her left ring finger a ring with a large diamond on it.

“Waah ... It’s so pretty.”

“It’s a perfect match for your beauty.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m so glad that you like it. ... That flower ring that you always have on your right hand—now that you

have this, you don't need it anymore, yes?"

"...? Ah, y-yes."

"Then, I'll hold onto it for you."

He told her this, and took off the ring that was always on her right hand. Come to think of it, why did she always put on this ring everyday—She couldn't remember where and why she had purchased it. As she stared at the admirably fitted, beautiful diamond on her left hand, she drifted into thought.

The pain that she had felt in her chest must have just been her imagination. But—

She felt a lonely feeling in her heart, as if a gaping hole had been opened up. It felt like she had forgotten something very important.

Perhaps it was merely because of the beautiful evening. The vermillion sky looked almost sentimental at a glance, the color somehow nostalgic.

# Chapter 3

## Part 1: Turning Gears

Claude Cathedral. Today, in the church that was said to be the sacred place closest to Heaven since the founding of Alphine, a solemn wedding ceremony was taking place. Yes, it was the wedding between Miku, the daughter of the Cryinpt family, one of the five most prestigious families within the kingdom, and the son of Viscount Iceburg, the wealthy merchant noble from the neighboring kingdom of Folle.

Many people, not only from Velcant but also the neighboring Tard Region, had all come to the wedding between the two families, who were both well-known in high society, in order to give their blessings. Even the Cryinpt family, whose bloodline had once been in danger of becoming extinct due to the early death of their family head, had settled,



saved by the marriage with the son of the Iceburg family, which would unite the two houses. For that reason, not only was the current family head, my mother, truly happy about the marriage, but so were all the servants from the Cryinpt mansion. Today... nearly the entire country was here to bless our wedding. Finally, my value of existence would be acknowledged. Today would be the day where I would shine the brightest in my life.

After finishing with greeting the majority of the guests, I went to take a break by myself in the garden behind the church. Since this morning, I had gone through numerous outfit checks and rehearsals of greetings, and spoken with the many acquaintances and guests who had already arrived, leaving me barely any time to catch my breath. I wanted to mentally prepare myself before the actual ceremony began. In this small, quiet garden.

Because of the fact that the main garden spread out in the front, there weren't made people that came through this rear garden and the forest that

extended behind it. However, because this garden wasn't very cared for at all, it wasn't a place many would go out of their way to come and see.

“Finally...”

I recalled the faces of those I'd seen gathered earlier. For the first time since we've started living together, I thought I'd seen my mother smile. It was still hard to have called that a genuine smile, but for someone who rarely even smiled calmly, it was something I had always wished to see. I had finally been able to make her happy. I had finally met her expectations. At least, that was how it was supposed to have been.

“Am I... happy?”

I simply wanted to be loved by mother. Although we weren't related by blood, she was the one who had done her best to raise me until now. Even if it wasn't out of actual love, I was fine with that. I had lived until now, putting all of my effort in continuing to meet her expectations, thinking it would be fine as long as I could be one day acknowledged for it. And

today, that wish had finally come true... and yet—

The emotions that came and went in my chest right  
now... Although...

## **Part 2: Beyond Affection**

Tard Region, Kingdom of Calmonde. This continent, which spread out on the other side of the sea east of Velcant, was up of many small countries. Calmonde, rich in nature and surrounded by mountains on all side, was also one of these small countries. Due to the difference between hot and cold seasons being much more severe in this continent than in Velcant, along with the fact that the most of the area was covered in mountains and forests, the population here was rather low, in great contrast with the vastness of the land. Most of the residents were farmers, the civilization here was not very developed, and there were even villagers that were entirely self-sufficient. Not many came from Velcant to spend the rest of their lives in this small country.

Len's house was a little ways east of the capital of Calmonde. It was an old mansion in the middle of a beautiful forest. The mansion itself wasn't nearly as

spacious as the Cyrint mansion, but it was well-kept by its few servants, and its design made it easy to live in no matter what season; it was both beautiful and functional. I had already grown quite accustomed to living here.

Half a year had passed since the day I had taken Len's hand and run away from the wedding. Every day, I heard various news that had travelled across the sea from the newspapers in the neighboring Velcant. The daughter of the prestigious Cyrint family had mysteriously disappeared. There were a wide variety of articles, some claiming it to have been a kidnapping, others elopement, and others even saying it was a spiriting away. But as I stared at those flat, printed words, it was if they were about someone completely unrelated to me. As I thought about what mother might be doing right now, about everyone back at the mansion, about Mr, Iceburg and all those who had come to the wedding, my chest hurt. My betrayal still weighed down heavily on me, and continued to cause my heart pain.

Surely, if they were to learn of my current situation, they would be both angry, and saddened.

Even so, I was no longer even capable of regretting that the choice I'd made on that day may have been a mistake. Something gained from something lost. It wasn't simply something placed on the balance of my heart to keep it steady, but something that had become very precious to me.

“Hey, Miku~ I finished peeling the apples.”

“Alright. Then, please prepare the butter next... huh?”

“Hm? What's wrong?”

The thing that Len was holding in his hand... had to be an apple. I glanced over at the scattered apple skin on the kitchen counter. No matter which way you looked at them, they were strange. To think that the peeled apple would become smaller... As I gathered up the thick skins, I said to Len, who was smiling cheerfully.

“... The apple skins are going to be the main focus now.”

“Eh? We’re using the skins, too?”

“We’re not, so that’s why I asked you to peel them off. And yet... you shaved off so much of the fruit, too.”

It probably wouldn’t be possible to make the apple pie he wanted with only this amount... If I remembered, there should still be a few more ripe apples growing in the garden.

“I’ll take care of this part, so please bring me two or three more apples.”

“What!? But I want to help too!”

“... It’s alright. The thought alone makes me very happy,”

I said with a smile, and after making a slightly embarrassed face, he cheerfully went to go pick the apples. Although he was able to do most other things so skillfully, for some reason, he was only

particularly clumsy when it came to housework like cooking and cleaning. Just like how he'd peeled the apple skins so thickly, when he'd helped with washing the dishes left by the maids who were on vacation, he had ended up breaking most of them. While he'd said that he had never done housework before, there were many other things about his daily routine that were unusual. I felt that this wasn't simply because of the cultural difference between Velcant and Tard. He had told me that he'd always lived alone, without any parents and siblings, so perhaps he was just a little out of the ordinary.

“Miku~ Is this enough?”

Len returned with a smile, holding an armful of apples.

“You picked so many. Just a few would have been enough.”

“If we have a lot, then we can make a big pie with them!”

“You really love eating, don't you, Len?”



“It’s because the apple pies you make are so delicious, Miku,”

He said, and hugged me from behind. The weight of his chin on my shoulder felt nice. However... I wouldn’t be able to continue cooking like this.

“Len!”

“... You smell nice, Miku.”

“... I can’t keep cooking if you hold me like this...”

“Yeah... I know.”

“If you know, then...!”

“Ahh... I’m so happy~...”

Happy. Len’s charming, high-toned voice seemed to melt into my heart. His arms around me were gentle. Ever since I’d come here, every moment was filled with these warm emotions.

“I’m happy too,”

I turned to face him, and met with kind, sympathetic eyes. I caught a glimpse of curiosity in them, and

smiled softly. He lifted up his left hand to stroke my cheek. The taste of apples lingered in our kiss.

\*

After finishing with the late brunch, I read the newspaper while drinking coffee. When I had been an angel, coffee had been too bitter for my liking, but after reincarnating into the male human, Len, it seemed that my tastes had changed considerably. And it wasn't only my tastes which had changed. I had become interested in knowing the major trends in society all the time, and although I hadn't had any interest in them before, I now checked the current events every morning, without fail. Today, it was written in the headline, "Mysterious massacre at the church! Unable to find a single lead, the police force struggles!" Church, massacre, not a single clue—the first thing that came to mind was *that* incident. It was the demon faith that I had investigated when I had once been an angel. There was no "proof" in the dispute between angels and demons that could be understood by humans. Even with the involvement

of the police, it was useless. Although in reality, the ones that suffered damage were neither the angels or the demons, but the humans. As I thought about these indescribably ironic things, I finished the rest of my coffee in one gulp.

Last night, Miku had said that a new maid would be arriving, and therefore, the servants in the mansion were all excited since this morning. I didn't know the details, but when I had gone into town the other day, I had heard that a female maid had come from Velcant in search of employment. Seeing as how she was also from Velcant, and furthermore, already had experience as a maid, it seemed that the offer had been accepted after only two correspondences with the mediator. Occasionally, I saw Miku behave as if she were homesick, so if she had someone from the same country close by, perhaps she wouldn't feel as lonely anymore. Also, it was a woman around her age, so they would have things in common to talk about. I was looking forward to seeing what kind of person they were.

It was right then that one of the maids came to call me, seeming panicked. It was still a bit early for it to be the arranged time, but perhaps they had already arrived. As the master of the mansion, I checked to see that my outfit was in order, and hurried down the staircase that led to the entrance hall. On the small, reception sofa in the hall sat a sleek, slender woman with long, beautiful blonde hair. The shape of her eyes was sharp and slanted upward slightly, and the blue color shone with certain defiance. All in all, she gave off an air of confidence.

... I couldn't help but feel like we'd met somewhere before. No, it had to just be my imagination. Looking at her from a distance, I felt a sudden pain in my head. I walked up closer to her, and our eyes met.

It would seem that it hadn't just been my imagination.

“Lily!”

Miku came running in from the rear. And with that momentum, she ran up and hugged the woman

named Lily.

“Lily...! I missed you...!”

“Lady Miku,”

The two of them stared at each other with misty eyes, overcome with emotions. For the while, the silence went on. The other maids put away their premature, welcoming mood for now, and returned to their respective duties. In reality, they were women that knew how to read the atmosphere.

“I was worried about you, Lady Miku. However, I am glad to see that you’re doing welling.”

“... I’m so sorry!”

“Oh, my. You never used to let me see your crying face back at the mansion. It seems... that you’ve become much more honest with yourself.”

“...!”

“Ufufu. I’m sure there is much to talk about, so why don’t we have tea? Together with the master, as well,”

She smiled in my direction as she spoke. This was our first time meeting. Right now, I was a young, freewheeling nobleman with a small amount of land in Calmonde. I had to act my part. Smiling in nostalgia, I welcomed my guest, who I was meeting for the first time, to the hall.

“Ah... Then, Lily, did you leave the mansion right after I disappeared?”

“Yes. Well, to be exact, it was a month afterwards.”

“... But, won't that look suspicious? For the ones at the mansion to disappear as soon as I had... Lily, what if you're suspected as being my kidnapper...?”

“It's alright, you needn't worry about me. Despite my looks, I have quite a bit of confidence in my strength!”

Saying this, she proudly flexed the biceps on her right arm and turned around.

“Certainly... There doesn't seem to be much to worry about,”

As I looked at her strong arms, I muttered this out loud.

“Oh, my my, but I am still but a frail maiden~ It was really quite troublesome making my way here! After carefully investigating any sighting of Lady Miku in Alphine, I crossed the ocean, traversed fields and mountains, and at last, I made it to the depths of this forest! Other people would have never been able to find their way here!”

I had escaped into the depths of this forest where I would never be found, in accordance with the intricate contract that I had formed with the demons. And yet, just what part of her information network and vigor was “frail,” to have been able to find this place, hidden from even angels’ eyes, in only half a year? If someone knew, then I’d sure love to hear it.

“Len! Lily isn’t so strong that she could defeat the great threats that dwell in this forest, you know? That was a terrible thing to say just now.”

And then, Miku said something to me that I didn't quite follow. Before two women, a man's opinion is equivalent to a small boat in a storm. I continued to speak, in a way that wouldn't anger them, if possible.

"I-I apologize. Um, Miss Lily,"

"Just Lily is fine, Master Len. You are the master of this house, after all."

I often would forget that I was the master of this mansion. Despite the fact that I had already been living here as a human for half a year, I still wasn't quite used to it.

"Lily, then. I'll be counting on you, starting today. Since you've worked as a maid before, I think you'll get used to working here before long. Ah, I'll be counting on you to look after Miku, too."

"... Understood. I look forward to working here, Master Len,"

Lily simply said this, and immediately went to



extend her greetings to the maids from earlier. It seemed that she had come all this way in search of Miku out of concern. And although she had now found her, she showed no intention of bringing her back to Alphine. On the contrary, her behavior seemed to suggest excitement in starting a new life in this distant, foreign country. I felt some of the weight lighten from my chest after seeing her positive attitude. Even if she weren't about to start working at this mansion from now on, she showed absolutely no accusation towards me for deceiving Miku and kidnapping her from the wedding to live here in secret.

“Lily! I'll show you around. First, I'll show you where your room is...”

I had already long thrown away my identity as Rin. From now on, I wanted to get along with her, who respected Miku so much, as “Len.” Even if it was to be a deceitful relationship.

“Oh, my! To think that Master Len himself would be

giving me a tour! ... Could it be that you have been charmed by my good looks...?”

“No, that’s not it at all.”

It would seem that, starting today, my life would be much livelier than it had ever been thus far.

“Well, we’ll be going now.”

“We’ll be waiting here for you to return with souvenirs~! Oh, and also, have a safe journey.”

“... Shouldn’t it be the other way around?”

“““Have a safe trip—!!”””

After being sent off by the lively maids, we left through the front door. It seemed like our skin would quickly become flushed in this scorching hot sunlight. Carrying a large trunk, we got into the carriage. There was no coachman. Starting today, it would be just the two of us for about a week. We would be going to a lake in the neighboring country for the summer. In the small carriage made for only two people, called a cabriolet, we sat next to each

other. Miku had been looking forward to this trip for a long time. Just seeing her face, filled with anticipation, was enough to make me smile.

“We’re here.”

Passing through the forest, descending the mountain trail, and taking several breaks, we arrived at a small villa on the banks of a beautiful lake after about half a day. Since I had begun living here in Tard, I was soon able to occasionally travel to neighboring countries for leisure trips, thanks to the relationships that I had slowly built up with other nobles. In fact, this villa had been lent to me by a good friend I had met two months prior at a small dinner banquet I had held. He had suggested that here was a nice place to take a trip to once it became summer.

I stored the carriage away into the shed, and took out the luggage. When I opened the door, I saw that the interior was very well-kept; the servants must come to take care of it frequently. It was a simple,

wooden-structured home, and well-furnished in each room. It was neither too gorgeous, nor very rustic at all; a house of very good taste.

“Len! Are there fish in the lake?”

“Hm...? Fish... He did say that he goes fishing often, so I think there should be.”

“Fishing? Oh, that sounds like fun! I’d love to try it!”

“Sure. After I put away the luggage, we’ll go fishing.”

“Yes, let’s have a competition to see who can catch the most fish! The loser will have to fulfill one wish of the winner.”

“Oh... Sounds good! I accept your challenge, young miss.”

“Wish” ... The ring of that word stirred my heart. Already thinking about what I would ask for after winning, I excitedly set off in search of my friend’s fishing equipment.

“ ... ”

“Ohh—!”

“ ...”

“Woah!”

“ ...”

“Caught another one! Aaand, there we go—”

At my feet, the bucket that I had prepared was already overflowing with many fish. I had never eaten river fish very much, but just from the look of it, I imagined it would be refreshing and delicious. After I had learned of “dining” upon becoming a human, I felt that I had become quite the gourmet. Especially when you get so hungry that anything you eat tastes wonderful; that time in particular is pure bliss. Just thinking about dinner made me hungry now. It was nearly evening, so it seemed a good time to dine soon.

“Hey, Miku...”

“... Not yet.”

Miku said this while glaring so hard at the water’s

surface that it was terrifying. It seemed that she still wanted to fish. However, the sun would be setting soon, and the results of the competition were clear.

“Ah~ ... Um, you know...”

“Not yet, I said... I still haven’t caught a single one...!”

“ ...”

Her eyes were glistening just a bit. Were those tears of frustration? I would have never thought that she’d take this competition so seriously. With earnest eyes, she stared at the end of the fishing line. I found her face to be very cute, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Wh... What’s so funny!”

“B-because... aha... You’re staring so hard at the water but... Not a single one...”

“Stop laughing~!”

“...ahahaha!”

“... Y-you’re so mean, laughing at me like that! Stupid Len—I hate you...!”

“Sorry...! Haha—”

I must have teased her too much. Miku’s face gradually lost its composure, and she looked like she might burst out crying at any moment. Even as she made this face, I wanted to monopolize her even more. I found myself thinking these inappropriate thoughts.

“I’m sorry,”

I pulled her into an embrace. She started squirming like a child, so I pressed my hand against the back of her head and forced our gazes to meet. With a wrinkle at her brow, she glared at me from point-blank range, but there was no strength in it at all.

“You look cute when you’re angry, too.”

“ ... ”

“Come on, cheer up. Please?”

“ ... ”

“Remember? The loser has to grant one wish of the winner—is that still not enough to make you do it?”

“No! I won’t really be happy even if I do so...”

She turned her head away again. Her entire upper body was twisted away from me.

“That’s bothersome...”

“... You hardly look bothered at all!”

“But I am?”

“... See? You’re laughing!”

“Am I? I always look like this.”

“No you don’t! You usually look much more handsome...”

“... Eh?”

“...!”

She seemed to be embarrassed by what she’d said and tried to stand up, but I strengthened my grip to stop her.



“Let go of me, please!”

“No way. I won’t let go.”

“Len, please...! Huh...?”

I’d been seen. Surely, my own face was as red as the sunset right now. She seldom complimented me by saying I that was handsome, or anything of the sort. My heart was pounding noisily.

“... Come now, it really is going to get dark soon, so let’s go back.”

I pretended like it was nothing, and stood up.

“Len... your face—”

“If you say any more... I’ll make you have the same face as me,”

As soon as I said this, she seemed to imagine something, and became tongue-tied, her face pink. She stared at me with eyes that seemed to expect something, and my heart sprang forward a bit in mischief.

“Come to think of it, the winner of the competition is

me, so... About my wish...”

I whispered this softly in her ear. Her face quickly reddened.

“~~~!”

As she stood still, unable to say a word, I took her hand, the bucket in my other free hand, and started to walk. She glared at me again, looking slightly rueful, but as before, there wasn’t any strength in the expression.

“Ah~ I’m so hungry... I’m looking to dinner.”

“... Right.”

Contrary to the now-heavy bucket, my gait was much lighter on the way back than when we’d come.

When it became night, we decided to make a simple meal with the fish that we... well, the fish that *I* had caught. I excitedly pulled out the cooking utensils, but after being told by Miku, “Len, you don’t have to help out, so just relax,” with a no-questions-asked-

smile, I was suddenly left with nothing to do. Each time I tried to help the maids with some kind of household chore, too, they nervously told me that I didn't have to since I was the master. I was hardly making any progress.

To kill time, I walked aimlessly around the garden by myself. The heat from the afternoon had subsided a bit, and the night air felt nice. As I continued walking like this for a while, I noticed that the area around my feet had suddenly gotten brighter. Wondering what it was, I crouched down and saw that it was a bug. I didn't remember seeing this kind of bug during the day. Leaning in to have a closer look, they seemed to be flying while emitting a soft light from their body.

I felt a sense of affinity towards creatures with wings. Perhaps it was because I had once been an angel, but I felt that these bugs also shared the hardships and troubles as others that had wings. As I stared listlessly at this beautiful, flickering bug, I heard her calling for me from within the mansion.

I'd have to tell her about this unusual bug. With quick steps, I followed the delicious scent of food that had drifted into the garden.

"Hey, Miku. Earlier, I saw this strange bug in the garden."

"A strange bug...?"

After we finished dinner, and I was rejected again when offering to help clean up, I relaxed by myself on the sofa. I suddenly remembered about the bug that I had found earlier, and started to tell her about it. She told me that she'd like to see them for herself, so we went outside again. The garden was glowing brightly. Many of those glowing bugs, many more than earlier, had gathered.

"Woah... There's more than before...!"

"Fireflies! So pretty..."

"Fireflies?"

"Yes, they're called fireflies. They live where there's clean water. Lately, there aren't too many in Velcant

anymore, but... It must be because there's so much nature around here."

"I see..."

Clean water, huh. Until I had come to live in the human world, I had never really realized that there were so many different lands and cultures. Heaven was the origin of everything. I remembered once telling her this. Although she probably didn't remember that now... Velcant and Tard differed greatly in its people, culture, climate, and practically everything else. Now that I was a human, I was very happy that I was able to see these large differences.

"Wow... The fireflies are pretty, but so are the stars."

"You're right... Ah! Miku, watch out!"

"? ...kyahh—"

As she walked slowly, looking up at the night sky, her foot stumbled into something. I embraced her body suddenly to prevent her from falling, but I also lost my balance, and we both tumbled to the ground.

“... L-Len, are you alright?”

“... I’m fine. Are you?”

“Y-yes, since you protected me... I’m sorry. ... Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

I was glad that she wasn’t injured. I decided that I would clean up this garden a bit, first thing tomorrow. I was sure that she must have stumbled on some trash or something. Rolling over, we remained lying there on the grass, and looked up at the sky.

“It’s so pretty... Both above and below, everything’s glowing.”

Before we noticed, there were fireflies floating around where we were lying down, as well.

“... Both the stars and the fireflies are pretty, but Miku’s the one that glows the brightest.”

“Ah...! Y-you always say things like that.”

“Because it’s true.”

“... Don’t say those kinds of things to other people.”

“... Are you jealous...? That makes me happy. But you know, I’ve never said them to anyone besides you, Miku~”

“I-I mean from now on...!”

“... Alright. I promise.”

“It’s a promise, alright?”

“If you’ll stay by my side forever, that’s enough. I don’t need anything else.”

“Mm... Me too. If you’re by my side, that’s enough.”

“ ... ”

“... Ah! It’s a shooting star!”

“Eh?”

For a split-second, a star streaked across the sky with a sparkle.

“Oh, another one! Hey, Len, did you know that if you

make a wish on a shooting star before it disappears, your wish will come true?”

“Really? ... Alright, here I go! Ah... It disappears a lot faster than I thought it would.”

“It’s rather difficult. A long time ago, my father also made a wish on a shooting star, and it came true.”

“Oh? ... What kind of wish was it?”

“He wished that his love with my mother would grow stronger, and right after that, they really did grow closer and became lovers.”

“Oh...? Your father sounds like he was an interesting man.”

“Doesn’t he? It’s so romantic...”

“... I’ll make a wish too, then. But... I don’t have too much faith towards the stars, so is it alright if I make the wish directly to myself?”

I gazed up at the starry sky, staring at nowhere in particular. Getting into fights over trivial things, and then making up and laughing it off. I felt so much



happiness from that kind of frivolous play. I simply wished that these peaceful days would continue forever.

### **Part 3: That Which Was Abandoned**

In order to blend in with the humans, I had made a contract with the old lady on that day. By sacrificing my angelic power, and in exchange, using a portion of demonic power, I was able to temporarily be reborn as a human. Because of the fact that there existed an equal amount of a demon's dark power and an angel's holy power within me while the contract was in place, I appeared, on the outside, to be an ordinary human that held neither power.

My body, too, had been changed into one of a male, as I had wished. However, I would only have this body for the duration of the contract, and the moment it was terminated, the balance of the two powers inside of me would collapse and destroy my body. It was uncertain whether or not my soul would return to the Tree of Life after that. But still, I had consented, and obtained this body. Using the connections that the old lady had in the human world, I had also acquired this mansion, and my

position as a noble.

However, the price of the contract had been the thing most important to me—the precious memories that Miku had of me, when I had still been an angel.

When I had first met her as Len, and she hadn't reacted at all when seeing me, whose face should still resemble Rin, I had, at that time, felt despair. But even so, she had taken my hand, and chosen to come with me. Thinking back on it now, it had been a risky bet. Even if she had married Mr. Iceburg as planned back then, I had intended to continue to remain in contact with her as a noble, and watch over her from the shadows. I hadn't expected much. That was why I suddenly feared all the happiness that I had now.

I glanced out of the window. It was late autumn now, and in this forest full of coniferous trees, I could see red and yellow autumn leaves. Autumn was, somehow, melancholic. I had never taken notice of these things as an angel.

Almost a year had passed since I had become a human. I had grown accustomed to living here by now, almost to the point where I'd forget that I was once an angel.

I stared at the letter in my hand, and picked up my pen again. I thought back to the letter that had been delivered to me this morning. The sender was unknown, and the letter had contained only a single sentence. I had never written a letter before, and wasn't quite sure about how to respond.

Resting my stilled hand and letting out a sigh, I heard a light knocking at my door. I answered, "Come in," and in came Lily, seeming quite cheerful. Today, the residents of the mansion would be holding a birthday party.

"Are we ready to begin the preparations soon~?"

There wasn't even a need to explain; "preparations" meant "Lily's Production." Even after coming to work at his mansion, her "production" habit still seemed to be going strong... Actually, I felt like it

was even stronger than before. She had to have been lying when she'd said that men tailoring wasn't her specialty.

"... Don't overdo it. It's just a birthday party, after all."

"So reluctant you are! Although it may seem like it's overdone, it'll be just right by the end. Moreover, it is *your* birthday that's being celebrated. We have to make it flashy!"

"You have good sense, but the refined tastes of someone born in Velcant city are a little too strong for countrymen like me."

"My! To call me the most prodigious producer in Velcant, such that would strike fear in the hearts of people... You'll make me blush."

"... That's not exactly what I said, though."

"I'm so excited~! Birthdays are celebrated only once a year, after all!"

Birthdays...

Today was not the day that I had been born as an angel. Unlike humans, angels don't remember the days they were born on. The moment of birth lasts only for that moment. There is no going back. Today was the day that I had been born as Len... In other words, it had also been the last day of Rin's life. To be honest, I didn't know whether I should be happy, or sentimental. When Miku had asked me when my birthday was, I'd ended up telling her that it was on this day, leading to the present situation.

“Come now, today will be the first party we've had in a while! Let's make it flashy, yes indeed!”

What Lily held out to me was a high-quality coat of a calm, deep green color, with lavish gold decorations. The pants were exactly my size, and for some reason, she had even prepared long boots and a decorative sword. It was like the outfit of some country's prince, and just looking at it made me feel a bit dizzy.

“... Am I... really wearing this...?”

“Why, of course! I worked extra hard to make it especially for today. Oh, and by the way~ This one is a compliment to an outfit I made when I used to work at Lady Miku’s mansion. It was a pink dress based around the theme of a flower nymph.”

“Ugh...”

I didn’t think it was true, but perhaps that was the one that pitiful angel that had been forced to wear in the past... As I recalled those memories, sweat rolled down my back. The nightmares were returning.

“Is something the matter?”

“Ah, no! ...Um, don’t be too hard on me, please. Since I’ve never worn something like this, you see.”

“Is that so~? This sharp, wild, and sexy outfit will suit Master Len perfectly, I would think~”

Lily was unabashedly praising, not her master, but the outfit that she had made herself.

“Speaking of which... The two of you seem to already get along so closely. Don’t you think that

Lady Miku has become prettier lately? It seems that what they say about women being more beautiful when they're in love is true~"

"Wh-what're you saying, all of a sudden...?"

"What could you be so worked-up over...? Those that have nothing to be guilty of have no reason to worry~ Hmm... Ohhhh? Master Len, you're actually quite skilled at making such darling faces! So handsome!"

"D... Don't tease me."

"Fufu. The two of you look so nice together."

I naturally blushed when I was told that we suited each other. I was genuinely happy to see that my relationship with her was being recognized.

"Lady Miku's outfit today is an apron one-piece focused on the color red. It's a rustic, village-girl style."

"Oh? That's rare. For you to make a rustic outfit."

"It's boring to make it flashy each and every time,



isn't it? You should have a variety in life~ And have fun wearing many different colors! Ah, but Master Len, you like the color black, don't you? You're always choosing that color. Do you happen to like the culture of Alphine...?"

"Ah... Well, no, that's not why, but... I just feel like it suits me."

Right now, that color... black, suited me.

"Black is the symbol of strength and authority, after all~ Things that most men strive for... Ah, but Master Len doesn't give off that impression too much."

"... Leave me alone."

"Ah, but tailoring is such a wonderful thing, isn't it~? This shivering feeling!"

"... It gives me the shivers too... In another way."

"Back when I used to work at Lady Miku's mansion, I would often feel this way. I had the highest quality of material to work with, but... After Lady Miku left,

she also disappeared without a trace. She was like a princess that had come straight out of a picture book... A girl of unmatched beauty~”

“Who’re you calling a princess!”

“... Huh?”

“Ah... No, I mean...”

“It’s alright, there’s no need to worry. You’re plenty cute yourself, Master Len! Ah, but when I look closely, there’s something about you which resembles that girl in a way.”

Being stared at from such a close distance, an unpleasant sweat rolled down my back. Don’t tell me... she’s noticed? Hiding my slight anxiety, I feigned anger and avoided the topic.

“Do you think there’s any man that would be happy to be called cute?”

“Ohh~ It would seem that you just didn’t catch my joke, did you? Rest assured, Master Len, you have the proper charming appeal of a male, as you

should.”

“ ...”

“Ah, shall I tell you something good?”

“Something good?”

“That beautiful girl who often came to visit at the mansion—she was such a friendly one.”

“... Oh, I see. I’m not really interested.”

“Ah~ Could this be jealousy I am sensing—?”

“...!!”

Wait just a minute. There’s no way that I could be feeling jealousy towards my former self... It wasn’t something I could say out loud, so I kept that comeback to myself.

“Ohh~ I’m so popular; it’s just so troubling!”

“... What?”

“You were jealous of the relationship that I had with that girl before, right? But not to worry! I am the tailoring maid of only this mansion now!”

“ ...”

Lily was getting worked up all on her own. It seemed cold to dampen her mood, so I decided not to say that I'd thought she'd meant Miku and “Rin.”

“Who ever said I was jealous? Geez. Still... I'll be counting on you from now on, too, Lily.”

I was certain that Lily hadn't noticed. Of course she hadn't. No matter how similar our faces were, men and woman differed from each other in every aspect, especially their bodies. She, who had tailored this outfit, should understand that better than anyone.

“Of course! If I can be of any use, then please, don't hesitate in asking for my help.”

Her warm words, and gentle gaze were enough to bring tears to my eyes.

“To think that Master Len would need me so much to regard me as his soul mate... I, Lily, have been deeply moved...! I must continue to meet those

expectations from now on...”

For some reason... The tears that had been about to fall completely vanished. I had a bad feeling.

“And, with that said! Here it is~! It’s time to get dressed~! Come now, please continue to rely on me to your heart’s content~”

“Gyaaah—! I knew it’d end up like this!! Mikuuu—! Help meeee—!!”

“Ohh—! Now wait just a moment! How disgraceful, to call for help from a lady. It is not becoming of a gentleman~”

Lily was, after all, Lily. No matter how depressed you were, just having her nearby would naturally cheer you up. And also, she was just a little... No, considerably merciless towards men.

Miku and the maids, who must have heard the noise, were gathered together in the hall downstairs and chattering with their own noise, as if to encourage Lily’s dress-up game rather than save me

from it. Feeling a slight annoyance at this “away” feeling in a mansion full of women, I peered downstairs to complain at them.

“““Happy Birthday, Master Len~!!”””

There was a sudden burst of crackers and a shower of flowers. The group of people gathered in the hall had already started toasting with wine, as if unable to wait any longer.

“... Even though I hadn’t even come out yet, honestly...”

I broke into a smile as I saw everyone enjoying themselves. That’s right, I was the star today. It was the anniversary of the day I’d started my life as Len.

“Alright! Everyone, let’s have some fun today! We’ll dance, sing, drink, and then...”

“Len,”

Before I’d noticed, Miku was standing beside me. She was holding a small, wrapped box.

“Happy birthday. ... Thank you... for being born...”

“... Miku,”

Thank you, I told her. Today, even if only for today, I'd forget about everything else, and enjoy the festivities.

# Chapter 4

## Part 1: Laws of Heaven

All around the pillars of flames that reached the heavens were a myriad of feathers that danced in the wind. Black and white, the bright red flames scorched and consumed that monochrome world. The holy land was completely burned to blackened ashes by “hellfire”, raising columns of smoke. Breaking through the gates, and without even glancing at the Celeste Garden, the demon troops headed straight for that place. Yes, the country that lay before my eyes presently, Alphine, and their destination that lay beyond it, the “Tree of Life.”

God cannot directly exercise His great powers. All must be carried out through the actions of another. The Tree of Life which exists in that land, also known as God’s Room of Creation; it encompasses all life, including ours. That was why the demons that



were flooding in at that moment could not be removed with His power. We were the only ones who could overturn these overwhelming unfavorable tides of battle.

Willing strength into my trembling wings, I flew to where my brethren were fighting in the burning flames. The hellfire made by the demons was filled with heinous dark energy, and even though Heaven was filled with holy energy, their power showed no sign of weakening.

“Ahhhh!”

A bullet flew by me and grazed my left wing. It hurt terribly, bringing tears to my eyes. At this rate, I, along with everyone else, would be finished. It’s scary, I want to run, I don’t want to be here!

While I’d been unaware, fire was closing in on me from the front. I held my breath in fear. I was done for...!

I closed my eyes tight, bracing myself against the pain that was sure to come, but no matter how much

time passed, I felt nothing. Very slowly, I opened my eyes.

“Are you alright, Kaito!?”

Giant, white wings covered me completely. And the moment that the huge, white axe was swung, as if drawing a circle in the air, the surrounding flames and demons were instantly purified.

“Caption Leon... I-I’m...”

“Get it together. It’s all over the moment you let your guard down.”

“But... I can’t...”

It was my first encounter with demons as an angel trainee. In comparison, my captain had accumulated much more experience than I, and was the leader of the Seventh Demon Subjugation Unit—which was said to be the strongest unit. We differed greatly. In the first place, my personality wasn’t suited for fighting; I wasn’t strong. During training, I was always losing to my colleagues.

“Don’t back down!”

“But—!”

“Even if you flee now, we have no place to return to. If we are unable to defend this place, both angels and humans alike—all of us will perish.”

“... But... I’m so weak... I wouldn’t even still be here if you hadn’t saved me just now... I’m just so weak, subpar; I can’t do anything!”

*Wham—*

My left cheek was struck, hard, causing me to stagger. I tasted the blood in my mouth. The tears that had had been building up out of fear immediately streamed down my left cheek from the shock of the blow.

“Try saying that again. Who’s a weakling that can’t do anything? And you still call yourself my disciple!”

“But it’s true...! I’m always losing to the others... Even now, I’m scared and my wings can’t stop shaking... I’ll never be able to fight!”

“You fool! Don’t just decide that on your own!”

“Nn...!!”

“It’s true that you’re a weakling, a crybaby, and an idiot of a disciple... However,”

The entire time we spoke, demons and hellfire continued to approach us. But, Leon easily wiped out the demons with a single clean swipe of his axe.

“You understand what the most important thing is. That’s why you are certain to become stronger than you are now.”

“The most... important thing...?”

“Yes. Strength isn’t determined by things like a resolute heart, or the willingness to fight. What matters the most... is kindness.”

“Eh...? Kindness...”

“If you aren’t kind... then you won’t be able to protect anyone.”

“Oi, Leon! It’s starting soon. We’re already reached

the limit. We have... to let Alphine Fall.”

An angel with beautiful wings and long, fluttering blonde hair suddenly flew over and issued that order. What could she mean by “Fall?”

“Let it... Fall. Must we really resort to that?”

“The demons have invaded this far in, so it can’t be helped. Right now, they’ve concentrated all of their forces in Alphine. We’ll have them Fall along with it. ... I’ll be doing it, so you and the other archangels should provide back-up. All those ranked under archangel should evacuate immediately.”

“Understood.”

After the orders had been given, the gold-haired angel soon flew off again.

“Um, Captain Leon...”

“You heard all of that, didn’t you? You should go find your partner and evacuate quickly, as well. Honestly, how’d you manage to fly right into the middle of this hellfire despite being an angel

trainee?”

“Ah... But, what about you, Captain? What will you do? Will you also be able to escape afterwards!?”

“Haa... Angels of your rank needn’t worry about such things. No matter what happens... Kaito, watch out!!!”

All of a sudden, my view was dyed a pure white. It was the white of Leon’s feathers. Heavy gunfire was shot at an alarming speed. Angels didn’t die; they weren’t supposed to. Even if they were shot in the heart... or lost their limbs... And yet...

“Cap... tain...?”

“It’s... alright. If it’s you, then I believe... you can do it... Have confidence... in yourself... Kai... to...”

Captain, your wings... don’t have any feathers. Was it because those huge wings have been shielding my small body...? Was it because he had completely shielded me...?

With a smile still on his face, light emitted from his

body, and he silently disappeared. All that remained were the countless, pure white feathers that had protected me from the gunfire.

“Kaito...! Kaito!!”

As my name was called, my consciousness emerged from my abyss of my soul’s memories. Although the distant memories of my past that should have been hard to forget, they had, for some reason, easily slipped away. A dream of my angel trainee days that I’d recently stopped thinking much about. I had only intended to meditate, but before I’d realized, I had fallen into a light slumber. The one that had pulled me out of my nostalgic dreams was an angel carrying a pair of large, red scissors. I made eye contact with Meiko, who was wearing a slightly confused expression.

“You seemed like you were having a nightmare.”

“... I was dreaming about the past.”

“... I see. It’s not such a bad thing once in a while. Looking back at the past.”

“... I...”

Four hundred years ago, when I had still been a trainee. Ever since that battle where I'd lost so many of my brethren, I had changed. I used to do nothing but cry and complain, and run away—but I felt that I had changed a lot since then. I had changed. And so had the world.

“The meeting will be starting soon. Sorry to have kept you waiting! Here's the document you asked for.”

“Apologies for troubling you with this.”

“It's nothing to worry about. Come on, let's get going.”

The archangel meeting. Today, we would finally be dealing with the topic that could no longer be avoided.

The other archangels were already seated around the Round Table. As they looked up at Meiko and myself, who had arrived late, the chatter died down



slightly.

“How unusual, for you to show up late,”

Luka, who would usually act defiant towards me, spoke with a look that resembled concern.

“Yes... My apologies.”

I seated myself after simply saying this. Everyone else seemed surprised at the absence of the usual hostile exchange.

“Now that everyone’s here, let’s begin today’s archangel meeting. The two topics that we will cover today are... the angel that has disappeared recently, and the adjustment period of the Tree of Life.”

The day where Rin’s fate would be decided had finally come. The Great Archangel read aloud the record of proceedings in a matter-of-fact manner. I feigned calmness so that no one would detect what I was feeling on the inside. I was always calm, keeping a poker face, so it wasn’t something difficult

to do. At least, it shouldn't have been.

“Well... First off, let's hear the investigation report. Will the one that did the investigation—...”

“That would be my unit.”

“Archangel Kaito, so it was your unit, then? And, what did you find?”

The surrounding archangels all looked at me with anxious expressions, and not without reason. Ever since “he” had Fallen twenty years ago, everyone was nervous when it came to this subject.

“... I have been searching this past year, using every resource I could, but I have yet to find her whereabouts. I also am unable to pinpoint the exact reason why she has not returned to Heaven.”

“... I see. Hmm. Then, it would be too early to draw a conclusion...?”

“... Yes. She is still but a novice that had only recently been promoted from a trainee. There was a previous circumstance in which she stayed in the

human world for a month, after being injured in a battle with a demon while investigating demon faith. This time, as well, she seems to have encountered someone from their side again... In the worst case scenario, there is a possibility that she may have been abducted.”

“Abducted... hm? I see. There is a law that states that those who involve themselves with the power of darkness, no matter the reason, will be eliminated, without exception, but... Next, let us hear what Archangel Meiko has to say on the matter.”

The Great Archangel called on Meiko, who sat three seats away from me.

“Concerning the management of the Tree of Life, have there been any traces of that angel’s soul circulating back to the Tree within this year?”

The Tree of Life. The souls of all humans and angels that died were returned to this tree. If it was the caretakers of the Tree, who managed the circulation of the holy souls, then they would know all details

concerning the circulation.

“... No, her soul has not returned to the Tree.”

“... I see. In that case, there are two possibilities.”

The Great Archangel concluded with an expression tinged with sorrow,

“The first is... She has remained in the human world for reasons unknown, unable to move. I expect you to act accordingly as soon as you should locate her, Archangel Kaito. It shall be a measure for your great accomplishments up until now. I leave it to you to make the judgment. The second possibility is... the slim chance that she has already Fallen... In other words, in the case that she has succumbed to the power of darkness... Archangel Kaito, you will need to make a decision.”

The archangels all quietly gasped. Perhaps they all felt pressured by the Great Archangel's overwhelming divine power. After hearing his earlier words, my palms began to sweat underneath my gloves.

Decision—In other words, it meant that I would end her life with my own two hands. There was no exception for those that had become Fallen Angels, no matter the reason. Traitors against God would be punished in the name of absolute justice. That did not change, whether it was now or in the past.

“There are none who object, I assume...? Then, let us proceed to the following topic. We will soon be entering the adjustment period for the Tree of Life...”

The discussion moved on, but the words only went in one ear and out the other. I would have to come to a decision.

For her... and for my own resolve.

## **Part 2: The Price of Betrayal**

The winters in the Tard Region were long. Unlike Velcant, where there was warm weather all year round, the atmosphere of all four seasons in this region was very beautiful.

I had acquired information that Rin was here in the small and remote country of Calmonde, which resided in the wide Tard Region that was under Gaku's direct control and management.

About a year had passed since Rin's whereabouts had become unknown. For angels, one year was not a terribly long time. But even so, to disappear without any explanation was unusual.

Normally, angels recognize things by relying on the holy energy within all life forms. That was why, no matter where she was in the world, she could have been easily located if I had tracked her holy energy. However, since about one year ago, all traces of her holy energy had vanished. No matter how much I

searched, I had been unable to sense her soul anywhere.

I had hurriedly searched the area in which she had battled with a demon previously, the human residence when she had gone incognito, and had my unit search all of Velcant, but I had not found a single clue. I had considered that possibility that her soul itself had vanished, but Meiko's report had overruled that theory. She had told us that Rin's soul had not yet vanished. There was no mistake in her report, as a caretaker of the Tree of Life. At around that same time, I had acquired a piece of information.

Rin was here in the human world.

In a corner of the quiet country town was a desolate bar. Although the night was still very young, the humans were already drinking and making much noise. The Gaudente Bar was the only tavern in this town, and seemed to grow crowded with both young and old people alike as they all gathered here on the

weekends.

I didn't dislike the hustle and bustle, but with the state my heart was in currently, the noise was a bit harsh on my ears. Hiding my wings and making the rest of myself visible to even human eyes, I entered the tavern to wait. Sitting down at the counter, this would be the first time that I'd drink alcohol paid for with human currency. Felle va Dous, a drink made by distilling apples from this region, had a rather fine taste for something from the human world. After a while, the bell above the entrance rang. A youth was standing in the doorway. In human years, he looked to be the age of one who had finally reached drinking age. Looking at his face, one that was etched into my memory so deeply it hurt, I realized it. I really had been naïve, after all.

The youth caught sight of me, and slowly, he smiled with a fleeting smile that seemed like it would vanish at any moment.

That smile reminded me of another colleague I had



once lost, making my heart stir slightly.

“This drink is delicious, isn’t it?”

After telling the shopkeeper that we had confidential matters to discuss, we moved to a private room on the second floor. The youth had ordered the same Felle va Dous as I, and drank it one gulp with an accustomed manner. When he said it was “delicious,” I could see from his expression that he truly enjoyed this “human refreshment.”

“... It’s not bad.”

“The quality of the apples this year is particularly great. That’s why the alcohol is delicious, too.”

“I see.”

“I went to the farm to help out for this season’s harvest, since they were shorthanded because it was a really abundant harvest this year.”

“Is that your job?”

“Yeah... It’s not much, but I manage the land around here. And, what about you...?”

“... Well, within this year, the demon faith has been spreading at a rapid pace. I was sent here, to the Tard Region, to investigate the damage caused by Honest. They’re shorthanded in Heaven, as well... As you know, this region is under Gaku’s control, however... The damage here is even greater than in Velcant, and so they ordered that I come to assist.”

“I see... As usual, things sound hectic.”

The meandering conversation continued. Between angels, there shouldn’t have been any need to worry, even if they hadn’t talked for a year; that amount of time was barely anything at all to us, after all.

“... Since I thought I wouldn’t be able to say it well once I saw your face...”

The boy who sat beside me took out a single letter from his pocket. I accepted the letter, which was beautifully sealed.

“I’m... not going back to Heaven anymore.”

“ ... ”

“But... I’m sure you knew that, with the way I look now...”

“ ... ”

“Even though... you came all this way... I’m really, truly...”

Before he could finish his apology, I pulled him towards me, pressing his face against my chest. I didn’t want to hear those words yet. There should be many ways in which I could still save her. I just had to think. There was still time.

“... Do you think I came all the way to the countryside to hear something like this?”

“... But...”

I felt my chest become cold and damp. He was crying without making a sound.

“Unlike the guy that’s in charge of this countryside place, I don’t have that much time to waste. You should know that.”

“ ... ”

“I don’t have so much free time that I’d give up my vacation simply to come down to the human world and look for just one, clumsy subordinate.”

“... Uu, Kaito...”

“So that’s why... Don’t you dare do anything troublesome, like disposing of that thing I spent my precious time looking for... Don’t you dare.”

“... B-but...”

“I will find a way to save you, without fail. ... I don’t mind if you stay in this form, so that’s why...”

I swallowed the words I meant to say next. An emotion that I was never meant to know. Burying it in the depths of my heart, something that I had to pretend not to know, just as I was doing now, forever —

She, who had become a boy, cried silently into my chest. Angels had no definite gender. Even though her appearance had changed, her soul remained the

same.

I most likely wouldn't be opening the letter that I had received from her. I merely wanted to avert my eyes from my heart, and from hers.

\*

I woke up in the morning to the sound of quiet snow.

As the snow piled up, it made a faint sound. Still drowsy, I turned on the lamp on the bedside table. In the still-dim room that was illuminated in a slight orange color, she was nowhere to be seen. She must have woken up early to make preparations.

The moment my feet touched the cold floor, a chill passed through my entire body, making me shiver. It seemed that it had gotten even colder today. Putting on a thick gown, I moved in front of the dressing table to get dressed. Perhaps because of all the drinks I'd had yesterday, I could see in the mirror that my complexion was terrible.

“Rin...”

A name that I hadn't been called in a long time. In the mirror was someone that looked a lot like myself —another me. It was obvious, but ever since I'd become Len, I hadn't heard that name again even once. Miku had forgotten that Rin had ever existed. Lily worried for Miku ever since coming here, but she never talked about Rin—about the time we had spent together in Velcant, either. Even Kaito, who I'd met for the first time in a while, had not called me by that name.

On the morning of my birthday, I had received a letter. The only thing written in it had been, "On the evening one week from now, I will be waiting at Gaudente Bar." There had been no name or address, but the moment I saw the neat handwriting, I figured that it must have been Kaito who had sent the letter.

Even I didn't understand what I'd been feeling at that time. I had been conflicted between feeling despair that those from Heaven had finally found me, and also happiness at the fact that Kaito hadn't

forgotten about me... about Rin, and had been searching so desperately up until now. Even though I had committed treason and thrown away everything for the sake of my own greed, the self that I'd been sure that I'd thrown away was still breathing quietly within me. I hadn't been hoping to be found, but somehow, I'd had a feeling that things would turn out like this. In the end, I hadn't been able to say what I'd wanted to say, and left after handing the letter over to Kaito. I had written my honest feelings in that letter.

“I'm sorry... Rin.”

It felt strange somehow, to be apologizing to myself. Rin was my past self, not a completely different person. Even now, this soul was Rin's soul.

The only thing that had changed was my body.

Even since I'd become human, I had experienced many changes. When it was nighttime, I would feel like sleeping. I would get hungry, and eat until I was full. I felt moved at the changes in the seasons. Time

passed slowly now. I felt lonely when I was alone... and I felt so happy that I was loved by the person dear to me.

“Rin... I don’t regret any of this. I’m glad that I became Len... I’m glad to be loved by Miku. I’m happy right now.”

From an outsider’s point of view, it must have looked humorous so see how I was talking to my reflection in the mirror.

This was a decision I had made.

For myself. For those that I had betrayed, and for her.

I patted my cheeks lightly to get rid of my low spirits. I had much to do today. Since the snow must have piled up a lot overnight, I had to help out the maids with the snow shoveling. After that, I’d eat the freshly baked break that Miku had made for me, let Lily dress me up with her new work... and then head out into town for some errands...



As I thought about today's agenda, my moods lifted a bit. It seemed that my ability to quickly change my mood and think positively hadn't changed from when I'd been an angel.

I hoped that today would be a good day. I got dressed quickly, and went to say good morning to her.

## **Part 3: Arrow of Judgement**

I walked slowly through the snowy forest. My surroundings were a complete snowy landscape; the branches of the coniferous trees that made up this beautiful forest were also all covered in white. Although snow was falling, the sunlight was still bright. This kind of scenery would have been rare back in Alphine, but I had grown used to it by now, and also felt that I could walk faster than I did before through the snow-covered roads. My ability to adapt to changes in the environment was quite high, due to being forced to develop it when growing up.

I had experienced some culture shock at first, but I was now more accustomed to living here than even Len, who should have already been living here for a long time. When he'd said that he'd never gone out during the winter time, it seemed that he'd been telling the truth. The day we walked through the snow-covered streets for the first time together was still fresh in my memory. Unable to keep his footing

very well, he had fallen down countless times, and although I wasn't used to walking in the snow any more than he was, I had pulled him back up by the hand each time he fell. When I recalled that shocked expression on his face whenever he fell, I couldn't help but smile. After experiencing what it was like to "slip," he tried out various different ways of walking, but still wound up falling down several times. He was a strange person; while innocent and still child-like, there were times when he gave off the impression of being so much mature and intellectual than I was. And while keeping up that appearance, his personality hid a strange charm that won over the love from both the maids and the people of the nearby town.

I hoped that he'd come home soon... Since the day before yesterday, Len had left for the capital. Supposedly, it was for work related to the land around here, and also some sort of personal business. He worked as a noble that governed this land, but since he didn't interact with other nobles

very much, he mostly only met the townspeople for work.

Before long, I noticed that the church has come into view. Perhaps because I'd been so deep in thought as I walked here, it felt like I'd arrived in the blink of an eye. It took about thirty minutes to walk from the mansion to this church, which was the closest one. Located beside the road that connected the forest and the town, whenever there was some kind of occasion in town, it would usually be held at this church. Since there wasn't anything in particular going on today, there was no one around. I pushed the door of the chapel, which was covered in thick snow.

“Um, excuse me—...”

The building I peeked into was empty of people. Usually, the nuns would always be here. Had they just stepped out...? Time-wise, it was still a bit too earlier to be called evening. Illuminated by countless candles, the room gave off a very

daydream-like atmosphere. I approached the altar, knelt down, and brought my hands together. Since long before, the time I spent praying to God would always calm my heart. Suddenly, I heard the sound of the door opening behind me. Had one of the Sisters come back?

“Sister?”

I couldn't seem them very well from where I was because of the light from outside shining behind them. There was no reply, so perhaps it was one of the townspeople who had come to worship? I tried approaching them a little, and when I did, the figure that was leaning against the door came towards me, and flapped open a pair of huge wings.

Wings... Clad in all white, with an appearance full of dignity... was an angel. I was so shocked that I couldn't speak.

“... Have you finished with your worship?”

His low voice echoed to the high ceiling. My entire body simply froze in the face of that dignified

demeanor.

“... An... An angel...?”

“Correct. However, it is nothing to be so alarmed about. There’s one close to you, as well, isn’t there?”

“Huh...!?”

I couldn’t believe my ears. I had never seen an angel before. Since my father used to often tell me stories about angels and demons at bed time, I had a strong faith towards God, but I had never actually seen Him before. And yet, with the way he was saying it, an angel had always been somewhere near me. That was what it sounded like. Unable to understand, all I could do was stare back at this overwhelming presence.

“... You don’t remember? Well, no matter. I have something more important to tell you.”

Saying this, the angel lapsed into thought, with his eyebrows wrinkled in displeasure, as if struggling to find the right words. What could he possibly have to

tell me...? But, if an angel were to ever appear and tell you they had something important to relay, I could only think of one thing. An oracle. Especially to those close to death.

“... Um... I... I’m sorry!”

In my confusion, those were the first words that came to mind. I could hide nothing before an angel, the messengers of God.

“I... Up until now, I have done many wrongs. I have betrayed my hometown, my mother, and my fiancée... For the sake of my own happiness, I’ve selfishly turned my back on many things...!”

“... Have you now? Humans are creatures full of greed. It’s only common nature for your race to abandon and betray others for your own desires. You are not the only one...”

“But...”

“Listen. I have not come here to make you repent.”

“Huh...?”

Deepening the furrow of his eyebrows, the angel continued, as if he had made up his mind.

“At this rate, you cannot be saved. ... The same goes for him. Heaven cannot forgive him; they will not turn a blind eye to his acts.”

“...!!”

Who did he mean by “him”? But... if I were to think of one who could not be forgiven, there was only one person that came to mind.

“Len...!! Is he... Is Len going to be punished by Heaven?”

“... tch. Yes... The things that he has done are an unforgivable taboo. There is no escape from them.”

“No... that can’t be...”

“However, there is one way. A way in which both he and you can be saved.”

“Please! I-I’ll do anything! No matter how much suffering it is... So please, tell me.”



“I see. Then I will tell you... Forget about him, and go back to your own home.”

“... What?”

“There is still time. Before they find out that he is still alive in these lands, dispose of all the evidence and bring things back to what they were before. If you do that, you should also be able to keep your life.”

“What... do you mean?”

I couldn't understand what the angel was saying. Bring things back... But to where? The sin of betraying everything and eloping—was that a crime punishable by death in Heaven? Or, had he committed an even graver sin, before we had met?

“The mere fact of the two of you being together is a taboo. That is why I am telling you to destroy all the evidence, before that crime is judged. Do you understand now?”

“Crime... But...”

“Time is limited. While you’re standing there idle, they may find out, and all will be lost.”

The angel was looking at me with slight irritation now. What did he mean by time being limited? I tried to sort out the thoughts in my racing mind. This angel meant to take Len away to Heaven for his sins. Did that mean that he would be saved, when he was supposed to go to Hell? But that would mean that I would be the only one to be saved—the only one to remain living on Earth. Even though... even though we were both guilty.

“I... I refuse...!”

“What did you say...?”

“Please... Please don’t take Len away...! I beg of you... I am guilty, as well! If he is to be punished, then punish us both!”

I pleaded with my head bowed low. I didn’t care what become of me. If I could just be with Len... If we could remain together, any punishment, no matter how cruel, would be tolerable.

“I... If I lose him... Then I will have nothing!”

“...!”

“He... showed me freedom. That day... he was the one that allowed me to be reborn anew. Thanks to him, I’ve come to see how enjoyable life is... If he’s gone, then I... I have no reason to live!”

He glared dagger at me. Was it only my imagination, or had a shade of sorrow flashed through those eyes?

“... You don’t understand anything. Do you think... that he wishes the same? Truly?”

“...!”

In a second, my heart stung. It was true. What would Len want? Just as the angel said, if we went our separate ways, then we could save each other... and avoid any punishment. Wasn’t it only natural to believe in the words of an angel, the messenger of God? If Len were here right now, what would he say? But, still, I...

“... Even so, I do not want to be apart from him.

Because...”

I tried to remember—the short time that I had spent with him. Even since coming to Tard, all those times full of gentle warmth.

*“If you’ll stay by my side forever, that’s enough. I don’t need anything else—”*

Those words that he had said; they meant so much to me. And I would also feel the same, always.

“Because I love him.”

“...!”

“And he, as well... He also loves me, from the bottom of his heart. Even without asking, I know this.”

What a dreadful thing, to go against the messenger of God... Despite all his efforts to come and tell us a way in which we could be saved... I was so scared that my legs were trembling. But still, if he would be by my side... Smiling, the angel made an expression of being deeply hurt.

“In that case, I have no choice... For that sin, I shall

have you compensate with your life.”

“ah—”

*Bang—*

I heard the dry sound of a gunshot. My surroundings slowly distorted and sank in slow motion. No, I was the one that was sinking...

\*

It was now late in the evening. I had said that I would return by night, but thinking that I wanted to see her as soon as possible, I quickened my walking pace. It had been a while since I had come to the capital, and after quickly finished my work in the urban area, I had walked all over the city, going from one jewelry shop to the next. The day before, when I had secretly consulted with Lily, she had politely told me Miku’s ring size and preferences. It was times like this that I wanted to express my heartfelt gratitude for her talent. I tried to search for a neat, pretty ring that would suit Miku’s slender and beautiful hand.

After a long search, the last shop I had come to held an aged, old-fashioned atmosphere. While looking over at the showcase without much expectation, I had found exactly what I'd been looking for, and happily made the purchase. The female shopkeeper must have been drawn by the grin I'd had on my face the entire time, and while she wrapped up the ring, she asked me for every little detail about the person I would be giving it to.

“How fortunate she is, to receive a ring from such a sweet lover. Is it an engagement ring?”

Being told something that that, I unabashedly said that I was the one who was really fortunate, and although I had only just met this shopkeeper, I ended up boasting about the relationship between Miku and I. The shopkeeper kindly told me to come again whenever I liked, and I left the store in good spirits.

As I continued to walk through the snow-covered path, my uncovered cheeks quickly became cold.

Passing through the gate of the mansion, I let myself in through the front door. The interior was warm, and I slowly felt the warmth return to my chilled lungs.

“Oh, Master Len, welcome home~”

“Hello, Lily,”

As I was took off my coat and shook the snow off in the entrance, Lily had soon came out to greet me.

“... Well~? Were you able to find it? *The necessary item~*”

“...! Hey! What if someone hears...!”

“And what of it~? You’ll be giving it to her right away, yes? Then I don’t see any problem here.”

“Th-that’s true, but... Ah, by the way, where is Miku?”

I wanted to show this ring to her soon, and have her try it on. The truth was, I had also practiced on how to propose when I had consulted Lily before, and so I was fully prepared.

“... Ah! Come to think of it, Miku hasn’t returned since going to the church late this afternoon.”

“Eh?”

“You two always go to the church on Sunday, correct? Although today, she went by herself.”

“I see... But it’s gotten kind of late now.”

The sun was already setting. Maybe I could take advantage of this opportunity and give her the ring at the church—it would set the mood quite nicely.

“I’ll go and find her.”

“Oh my, but you’ve only just come back...”

I put on my coat again, and quickly got ready.

“Please come back in time for dinner~ Take care~!”

I was seen off by Lily, and quickly proceeded along the snow-covered path that went through the forest. I had to hurry if we were to return to the mansion before nightfall. Would she be happy to receive this ring, and hear my proposal? Cheerfully, and at a



quicker pace than before, I headed to the church where Miku was.

All I could hear was the crunch of the snow underneath my feet. The snow continued to fall at a steady pace, erasing my footprints as quickly as they were made. And then suddenly, although there should be no one other than myself in this forest, I felt a sense of unease. In the midst of this snowy landscape, all energy flowed quietly. Which was why I was able to feel slight presences or changes in the flow more acutely than usual. Although my senses had declined marginally since being reborn as a human, I knew immediately when beings with strong presences, like angels or demons, were nearby.

“... Who’s there?”

I turned around to face the way I had come, glaring at the trees. I couldn’t see anyone. However, I had felt this presence before. I stood there in the silence, without uttering another sound.

“... Haaa~ Looks like my cover is blown. Your intuition’s gotten sharper than before, huh?”

While saying this, the red-haired demon whom I had confronted previously stepped out from the shade of a tree. All the muscles on my back tensed.

“Relax. I’m not gonna do anything.”

“ ...”

“On another note, you’ve sure changed a lot again since the last time I saw you.”

“ ...”

“Back then, I never would’ve guessed that you would turn into a human—and a male, no less. Ahh, but you were such a cute wittle angel~ What a waste~”

“Is that all you wanted to say...?”

“Oh~? ... Well this is unusual. Whenever I provoked you like this before, you’d get all worked-up and say, ‘Be quiet!’ or ‘Shut up!’ Personality-wise, you’ve seemed to have gotten more mature, hm~?”

The demon talked in the manner he always did, and slowly approached me while speaking. He had said that he wouldn't do anything, so I stood my ground.

“Oh? So you're not gonna run?”

“Because you said you weren't going to do anything. And anyway, the one you're interested in is Rin, isn't it? Not me.”

“... Haa. You're such a killjoy, honestly... I don't have any interest in guys, but since your face is still exactly like Rinnie's~ ... Well, I guess that's obvious. By the way...”

I made eye contact with the demon that had walked up to me. His lips were pulled into a relaxed smile.

“There was something I wanted to ask you~ I thought about asking you afterwards that day, but then you suddenly disappeared somewhere~ It was a lot of hassle to track you down, ya know? Granny was stubborn and wouldn't tell me either, so I had no choice but to secretly follow that sulky angel, and when I did... Bingo~”

By “sulky angel,” he must have meant Kaito. To be able to follow Kaito without being noticed, it seemed that he was no ordinary demon, after all. The demon slowly stretched out his hand, and touched my left ear with a long nail.

“Hey, about this earring on your left ear... Where did you get it from? You used to have it on your right ear, didn’t you?”

“... I have no obligation to tell you.”

“Oh, come on... Who was the one that helped you Fall, hm? Why can’t you tell me, huh? Or... Is it because you have something to hide?”

“ ... ”

“... No go, huh~? Then, I wonder if you’ll still keep that attitude after seeing this?”

The demon took something out of his pocket and held it out towards me. It was a small, cross-shaped earring. The same as the one I had on my left ear right now. Yes, that was—

“...! Wh-where did you get this!?”

“Hmm— ... Not gonna tell ya.”

“What...!”

“After all, you won’t tell me either. So we’re even.”

“... tch. Fine. I’ll tell you. It... was given to me by the angel who used to be my partner. I used to have it on the right... but now I put it on the left. Because I heard that human males usually wear earrings on their left ear.”

“... Oh~ I see... So, let me ask you something else. That angel... Where is he now?”

“... I... don’t know.”

“Hmmm...”

“Well? Why do *you* have an earring that’s exactly like mine!?”

“... I got this when I was still just a little itty-bitty demon... From the angel that you mentioned. Although, it’s already been three hundred years

since then.”

“?”

When I had first met “him,” from the time that we had first become partners, he had always worn only one earring. Then, did that mean that long ago, even before I had been born, this demon had received the other earring from him?

“So this means that we both received one side of the same pair of earrings from the same guy, huh?”

“Why did he give it to you? These earrings are difficult to obtain even for senior angels... It’s something that’s only given to those with special achievements in Heaven...! And yet, why do you have it? What connection do you have with him!? Don’t tell me... it was you who...”

“... You really haven’t changed at all, have you~? You get worked-up so easily~”

On the day that “he” had cast away Heaven, his presence had been nowhere to be found in the

human world. Even during the period when I had searched with the other angels, we hadn't been able to come up with any clues. And yet, this demon... If this demon knew the secret behind his Fall, then...

"I thought I'd finally gotten some clues, but... looks like I'm back to the drawing board, huh~? Good grief. I'm gonna get tired to looking 'round in circles soon... I wonder if he's already dead..."

"What? Why are you searching for 'him'? You're a demon, aren't you?"

"I've told you before, haven't I? It doesn't matter to me if they're an angel, or demon, or human or whatever. I just have something I wanna tell him..."

"Something... you want to tell him?"

"You should be aware of what's been going on lately through newspapers or some other source, right? It's going to start soon... The Heaven War."

"...! Do you mean—"

"Oops, you won't be hearing anything more outta

me. And anyway, it has nothing to do with you, a human, right? Whatever happens between angels and demons, I mean.”

With a flap of his wings, the demon flew off. The snow that had piled onto his jet black wings fell off easily.

The demon had mentioned a war. In other words, the demons that increased their power through demon faith must be about to carry out some kind of large-scale plan. By using Honest, their brainwashing technique, they had been gathering power from devout and strong-willed humans. Lately, I had noticed that news of the damage even here in Tard increased with every passing day, but I wouldn't have imagined that the situation had gotten so serious.

I had to let Kaito know as soon as possible.

There was a thud as the snow fell off of a nearby tree. My jumbled thoughts were pulled back to reality by the sound. That's right; right now, I was



the human, Len. Not Rin the angel. I no longer had the power to fight as an angel. It wasn't only now that I'd realized the demons had been continuing to store demonic power by manipulating humans with Honest. All this time, I'd only be deceiving myself, saying that it had nothing to do with me because I was a human, because I couldn't fight.

After I stood there dazed for a while, I finally calmed down and came back to my senses. —What I had to right now was catch up with my loved one, who was late in coming home.

And anyways, Kaito was sure to come and see me again. I would tell him the information I'd heard from the red-haired demon then. And about "him," too. Kaito had told me that he'd keep my life here a secret from those in Heaven, but it was surely only a matter of time before they found out. So until then, I wanted to hold onto the happy lifestyle with her as long as possible. That was why I wanted to do as much as I could for her right now. I clutched the box that I'd put away in my left pocket. How would she

react when I gave her what was in the box, and told her those words? Would she be happy? —Right now, I would live thinking about only these things.

This was the path I chose. With a slight guilt weighing down on my chest, I hurriedly walked on.

The silent chapel was illuminated by the afterglow of the numerous candles, and although the sun was already setting, in here, it was as bright as day. The flowers that beautifully decorated the altar were a crystal clear white, just like the snowy landscape outside. What flower was that again? I couldn't remember the name. I felt like someone had once told me that it was a very rare flower.

As I vacantly thought about such meaningless things, I stood speechless at the scene that spread out before my eyes. The moment I'd found her dyed in red, my legs had stopped moving, as if frozen in place. My uplifted spirits from just a few minutes ago sunk as if they had been a lie.

Slowly, I moved forward, one step at a time. I was

scared, and I couldn't move my legs very well. I had already grown used to walking on these human legs, but in these crucial times, my body wouldn't function.

I slowly walked up to her side, and finally, I made it. The walk had been excruciatingly long, making a second feel like ten minutes, or even an hour. With a deep red blossom on the left side of her chest, she lay motionless. Her face was peaceful, as if she were asleep. I held her cold body close to me.

“Miku...”

There was no reply. And there wouldn't be one. Her heartbeat had already long since stopped.

“Miku... I'm begging you... Please... open your eyes...”

I whispered in her ear, even though I knew that she couldn't hear me. When I had been an angel, this was a scene I was used to seeing on jobs finding the humans recorded on the Ascension Notice List, and guiding their souls to Heaven. At those times, the

grieving ones that were left behind would usually be there beside the person who had died. I had also been in that situation numerous times, and should have been used to it already. However, the emotions I held in my chest now were incomparable to anything from those past memories, overwhelming me with despair, anger, and sorrow.

“It’s... my fault... All of it.”

That day... if only I hadn’t gone to her wedding, pretending that it had been a coincidence. If only I hadn’t held onto that small hope, and hadn’t met her... Maybe then, things wouldn’t have turned out this way. I felt like I would be crushed by the guilt and wrongs that I could not atone for. I should have known. Since the day that I’d met with Kaito again. No, even before that—since I had become a Fallen Angel, and decided to live my life as a human. All of this had happened because my own selfish desire.

I had wanted to become human. Become human, and live together with her. I had wanted to satisfy

her loneliness with my love. And then, perhaps, if she possibly loved me back... That was all I had ever wished for.

For that sake, I had cast away so many irreplaceable things. My kind colleagues, my caring superior, my proud mission as an angel, and, my own self. I had spent many sleepless nights full of regret towards all that I'd abandoned, but each time, I was comforted by her smile. No matter how terrible I felt at night, once the next morning came... and I saw her smile, I was able to cheer up. If only she would be by my side—those feelings I had conveyed to her on numerous occasions had not been lies.

“Everything I told you that day was true.”

Although I'm sure that you don't remember anymore. When I had still been Rin, I had made a promise to you on that day I'd revealed my true intentions for the first time. I had vowed to always be by your side and protect you. Although you may have only thought it to be an angelic blessing or

something like that. I had vowed to you... To the point of rebelling against God.

“So that’s why, I will protect you.”

I would cut off my contract with the darkness, and unleash my angelic powers again.

Uttering the spell to end the contract, the darkness disappeared, and the suppressed holy energy swept over my body. The law of Heaven stated that a person who had committed a sin would be punished for it only once. If this was the “punishment” that she had received, then her life should no longer be targeted by those from Heaven. I had no choice but to believe that.

“... I’m going to wake you up now, so hold on just a little longer...”

I slowly lifted her up and brought my lips to hers. Using all of my holy power as an angel, I would bring back her soul. Of all the taboos, reviving the dead was the heaviest crime. The price I paid would be my own soul.

Her memories, which had been lost as compensation for my contract with the devil. More than anything, I was afraid that she may come to hate me after her memories returned, and she knew of everything that I had done.

\*

When I came to, everything around me was enveloped by a dazzling light.

What had happened to me...? If I recalled, I had met with a blue-haired angel...

We had talked.

I had refused his advice.

And he had gotten angry, and taken out a gun...

I...

Had that been a dream...?

As I lay here with hazy vision, I slowly opened my heavy eyelids. Right in front of me, smiling gently was...

“Good morning.”

I had seen her face somewhere before.

I had heard this voice once before.

This sensation, which I hadn't felt in a long time...

But for some reason, it didn't actually feel like such a long time. That was because...

Yes. Of course. This girl was...

“You were sleeping so soundly, I thought you might never wake up.”

“Ri... n...?”

“ ...”

“Rin... Is that you, Rin...?”

“... I'm sorry for tricking you this whole time... It looks like your memories are back. Do you feel alright?”

The inside of my head was spinning, as if being swallowed by a flood. The fragments of memories that I had forgotten were coming back. The precious



memories of all the joyous days that I had spent with her—with Rin. Why had I forgotten such precious memories until now? Even though I should have noticed when I had met him... Len, who looked exactly like Rin.

The day of my wedding, Rin had become Len and come to save me... Why hadn't I realized that until now? That day, when Rin had comforted me while I cried, promising me that she would always be by my side to protect me—how could I have only now noticed that she had kept that promise all along?

As I looked down at my body, I saw that there were traces of blood here and there. I realized that it hadn't been a dream, then; I really had been shot by that angel. —Yes, I was sure that I had been shot. Then, why was I here now, as if nothing had happened?

“I have to go now.”

“Huh...?”

“Miku...”

I was enveloped by a gentle and familiar scent. Rin was holding me so tightly that it hurt.

“I’m so glad that I met you, Miku.”

“Rin...”

“I was so happy... that I was able to love you.”

“...? I... love you too, Rin... um, Len...?”

“Haha. It doesn’t matter what name you call me by. Because I won’t change... Although my appearance may, my feelings will always stay the same...”

“...! I... I feel the same. Even if Rin is Len, or Len is Rin... I still love you, all the same.”

“Miku... I’m so happy. I feel saved just with those words alone...”

“Rin...”

“Thank you for everything. I love you.”

Suddenly, a blinding light spread all around me. The person who was holding me gently smiled with the

most beautiful smile, and cried.

“ah...!”

She was becoming transparent. While emitting a faint glow, her body... was disappearing...

“No... it can't be... Rin...?”

“ ”

And with those final words, the light vanished.

“Rin...?”

No matter how much I called, there was no reply.

“Rin...? Len...!”

It was then that I saw something out of the corner of my eye. In the place where she had been just moments before was a single black feather, and a small box.

“A feather...? A black... feather?”

Angels' feathers were supposed to be white. Rin's feathers, too, had been a beautiful white. I was sure of that... So why was there a black feather here...?

I slowly reached for the box and opened it. Inside, there was a beautiful ring with a white flower motif. It was the same design as the ring that she had gotten for me that time we'd gone to the shooting range stall together. On the inside of the ring was a single phrase. Written there were words of love.

*"Always... Now and forever, I will be by your side to protect you."*

Always... Truly, always, even when I had forgotten, you had been there for me, Rin.

*"If you'll stay by my side forever, that's enough. I don't need anything else—"*

It was the same for me... Len. I was so glad just to be with you... I didn't need anything else... Anything at all...

Something warm and damp slid down my cheek. They refused to stop, continuing to flow until this small church may eventually be swallowed up in them.

# Epilogue

From a faraway church, the sound of the bell that tolled before evening could be heard.

There were few churches in this remote, seaside town. The sound of the bell that came from the small church built at the seashore was carried throughout the entire town by the strong breezes.

I then heard someone call for me from the second floor. I halted my supper preparations and hurried upstairs. It was a small house, the kind that middle-class commoners would live in. As I was the only maid in this house, I had to carry out all of the work diligently alongside my main occupation as the tailor. After reaching the top of the stairs, I knocked on the door of the room at the very end of the hallway, in a place that received good sunlight.

“Come in,”

Once I entered the room, I saw that this house’s mistress was in a flustered state, with a troubled

expression on her face.

“Lily! Oh, she just hasn’t stopped crying since a while ago... What should I do?”

The baby was, indeed, continuing to cry with loud wails. I moved closer, and gently taking the baby in my arms, I stared into her eyes. They were a pretty blue color. For some reason, the moment my eyes met with hers, which were as blue as the sky, she froze.

“H-has she stopped crying...?”

“It would seem so. ...Perhaps she was calling for me.”

My blue-haired mistress looked back and forth between me and the baby, and then giggled. She raised a hand to elegantly cover her mouth, the beautiful ring she wore, with the white flower motif, glittering.

“Somehow, the two of you look like mother and daughter. The color of your hair and eyes look

exactly alike.”

“Wha...! I-I do not desire children quite yet! Not until I’ve dominated this world with my productions...!”

“My, then in that case, may I ask you to work on making this child’s clothes right away? I’ve heard that the baby clothes industry is on the rise lately.”

“...I-is that right?”

I glanced at the baby, and although she had stopped crying earlier, her face began to scrunch up again. I must have been imagining the tint of fear in her expression.

“Oh no, she seems about to cry again. Do you not like Lily’s clothes that much?”

“L-Lady Miku...!”

I carefully handed the baby back to her. And as if handling a precious treasure, Miku stroked the baby with a gentle hand. The baby, who had been on the verge of tears, immediately relaxed again and

smiled. Oh, how spoiled this child was.

“Ah—”

“Hm? Is she trying to say something, I wonder...?”

“Uuu— ahh—”

“Lily, come closer for a minute.”

After being told this, I met eyes with the baby again. This time, she seemed to be laughing happily. Crying and then laughing—how busy this child was. It was fine to be honest, but not to outwardly show everything you were feeling. It seemed that I would have to discipline her on the etiquette and modesty of being a lady in the near future.

“Ah, come to think of it, she’s been holding something in her hand this entire time.”

“Uuu— uu—”

Making wordless sounds, she stared intently at me while waving her hand.

“...Is it for me?”



She touched my hand softly with hers. Held tightly in her grip was a small seashell.

“Oh... it’s so pretty! If I remember, this is the seashell we picked up when we went to the beach yesterday.”

“...Thank you.”

The baby laughed again. It was a golden shell. As I looked at that shell, which was shaped almost like a wing, I felt my eyes grown hot. It was said that in the human world, you cried more easily once you grew older; right now, I was finding that that was quite a bit of truth in that.

No matter what age it was, time always passes without slowing down to allow rest.

It’ll be alright; this time, I will be the one to protect —this world that you all loved, and them, as well. So that’s why, there is no need to worry.

“...Do you smell something burning from downstairs?”

“Ahh...! I completely forgot that I was heating up the stew!”

“G-goodness!”

We hurriedly rushed downstairs together. The stew would probably have to be redone.

I had a feeling that someone who wasn't here in this place, was smiling right about now.

# Side Story

## Chapter 1: The World Which He Loved

The Fallen—

It means exactly that.

When an angel Falls, and they are corrupted. Both their body—... and their heart.

For angels, there is no clear distinction between their bodies and hearts, so perhaps it is easier to understand if we were to say it is their “soul” itself that Falls. If the tainted soul of an angel were to Fall from here, where would it end up? The Earth...? In that case, “Earth” would be, in comparison to Heaven, an inferior land—a place for sinners.

Once they have fallen to that land, they “set out on foot” — In other words, they become “human.” Humans carry the burden of sin. That is why they

must live on “Earth” after their Fall. Because they have no wings, they cannot fly freely, or return to the paradise of Heaven.

Oh, what pitiful creatures humans are... Let us to help you live a more peaceful life in the land in which you have Fallen, if only slightly. Yes, with the divine protection of our great God and His angels, we shall lead you to some blessing in this dirtied path that you have chosen. For humans cannot live without our power... It is due to our protection that they have “life.”

That must remain the most important thing in this world. Even if the true answer were to be discovered —

\*

Before his eyes was a small church. Riding on the crisp winds of early summer, the beautiful sound of bells echoed. In the center of the aisle, a young human couple faced each other, swearing eternal love.

However, something such as that is not to be expected for humans. Humans have their “limits.” To angels, their lifespan are a mere blink of the eye; brief and fleeting. Yes, by tomorrow, this time of happiness will have passed... By tomorrow, no one would be able to see the faces of this joyous couple anymore —

Glancing at the faces of the newlywed couple, whose names were recorded in the “Ascension Notice List,” the youth narrowed his gentle, blue eyes. They were both only eighteen years old. For humans, an age where both their bodies and minds flourish the most. And yet, to see those lives, still so full of hope, result in death, he can’t help but feel a bit saddened, even as an angel.

“There don’t seem to be any problems,”

Looking up for the source of the voice, he sees a youth with blue hair descend, with his large wings stretched out wide. As usual, there was a deep wrinkle at his brow, and at a glance, he appeared

very displeased.

“Ah, Kaito, welcome back. There aren’t any problems over here, either.”

“I see. Then, let’s move on to the next point. At the hill that lies beyond here.”

“Ah, hold on a minute,”

Saying this, he—the youth with the beautiful blue eyes, flew nimbly over to a flowerbed in the church’s rear garden. Kaito wondered what he could be doing, and watched his actions in silence. The flowerbed was filled with beautiful flowers in full bloom. It was early summer, the season in which all kinds of flowers were flourishing and fresh.

“Found it!”

After looking in the flowerbed for a while, he finally plucked a single flower.

“What is that?”

In his hand was a purple flower. Its thick and slender petals gathered beautifully, opening up

towards the heavens.

“It’s called a tulip. Pretty, right? We don’t have this flower up in Heaven,”

The youth said this, and entered the church with the flower in hand. Although they were in the midst of a wedding inside, the humans wouldn’t be able to see him since he was an angel. The priest was speaking words of blessing to the newlywed couple.

Asking for a blessing from God for the two lovers.

While the priest continued with his lengthy speech, the youth quietly moved closer to the couple. The two gazed at each other with deep, genuine love.

“At the very least, even if only for today... I will grant you two eternal love,”

The youth whispered this, and brushed his hand against the young couples’ cheeks.

“!”

At that moment, a gust of wind blew between them.

The two staggered at the sudden wind that was blowing in the closed church. The priest, too, was speechless.

After a moment, dancing in the wind above the couples' heads, a single tulip came fluttering down.

“So beautiful...”

The two took the floating tulip in their hands and said quietly,

“Ohhh... ohhh, how wonderful! This can only be a blessing from God!”

The priest's face had reddened, ecstatic about the sudden wind and the tulip that had come fluttering down.

“The blessing from the Heavens is a purple tulip...! In flower language, that's...! It is as if a miracle has occurred!”

At the priest's words, the church stirred noisily. The young couple, the priest, and all of the wedding attendants were overjoyed at the miraculous



blessing from God.

“At the very least, even if only for today, I grant you ‘eternal love.’”

The youth, with a shade of sadness glinting in his beautiful blue eyes, quietly flew off.

Even if that promise should be broken tomorrow...

Right now, this moment, would still remain as their truth.

The quiet, innermost chambers of the temple. In the Tandelman Temple, the place closest to God, a meeting was being held to discuss the strengthening of the opposing demonic forces and reviewing of the laws.

The Archangel Meeting—A sacred gathering that is held among a few, elite angels, selected from a pool of many. The strict laws and hierarchical system in Heaven, the ideals of angels, how to engage with the human world... everything involving Heaven is determined in these meetings.

Angels are separated into five main ranks. From the top is the great archangel, followed by archangels, senior angels, junior angels, and finally, angel trainees. In every generation, there is always only one angel that holds the highest ranking of great archangel. The only one able to directly speak with God is the great archangel, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that they are substantially the one that holds the greatest power in both Heaven and the human world. By listening to the will of God, who does not directly interfere with the human world, the great archangel commands the other angels to manage the world. The current great archangel was appointed directly after the Great Heaven War; a novice leader. Compared to previous angels that have served as the leader of Heaven, he is still fairly young (although, already he is slightly over one thousand and five hundred years old). He appears to be a kind, gentle old man on the outside, but contrary to appearances, he once held mighty power so strong that he eradicated an entire human

country with a single wave of his cane.

Below the great archangel, there are thirteen archangels. They also engage in one of the three destinies that angels are bestowed upon birth—combat, circulation, or divine protection. Although these positions are all equal, recently, the prominent angels of Michael, armed forces bearing the destiny of combat, have been evaluated to consist of powerful individuals. Because of this, while the positions themselves are equal, there are great differences in the actual power that each is able to exercise.

Powerful individuals are endeared by many senior and junior angels. Furthermore, what they obtain from their production allows them to utilize an even greater power. Junior and senior angels are strictly prohibited from direct involvement with the human world, but because archangels are designated as being necessary to public peace in the human world, they are allowed to intervene when necessary. God's Judgment and Blessings—many phenomena that

hardly seem to be the work of humans are all actually due to the intervention of archangels.

And so, gathered at the Round Table were the thirteen archangels, and the great archangel.

At the time, the structure of Heaven's real power consisted of novice archangels that had only recently been appointed. Even after a hundred years, the scars from the Great Heaven War ran deep. After inheriting the wills of their many fallen brethren from the war, they were in the midst of performing measures to strengthen their own angelic power against the opposing demonic forces. Although they bear wounds from the war, several reforms have been planned to build a stronger Heaven both physically and mentally, based on a system of a wealthy society and powerful army.

Today's topic was "the correct form of churches in the human world." In order to further implement Heaven's magnificent power in the human world, it was believed that first, the churches had to be

reformed, in order to gather faith.

“Ahem... About the newly-opened Droen Cathedral in the Velcant District...”

“The problem lies with the colorful and sketchiness of the stain glass material! It will only encourage immorality, and have a negative effect on future generations...!”

“Yes, I agree on that, as well. In particular, I suggest a wonderful imagery on the back wall of a hero wielding a sword. It brings such a feeling of familiarity. The sword, I mean...”

“At the one I went to the other day, they were handing out these delicious snacks before the prayer!”

“Hm. Lately, ones that have roundness seem to be popular, but I believe ones with a sharp edge would look better...”

“Concerning the ‘correct form’ that was mentioned in the topic, does this ‘form’ mean appearance-wise?”

Or is it the form as in the ideals? Without clarification, I cannot form a solid opinion...”

“ ...”

The archangels gathered were, as usual, unsettled and disjointed in their thoughts. Although they were all outstanding angels who had survived and played active parts in the war, many of them lacked the ability to cooperate.

It was when each continued to assert their individual opinions, and the topic has become rather heated-up. The young angel who rested his cheek in his left hand had been silent throughout, but he now stood up from his seat with a clatter.

“ ...”

The noisy room suddenly became very quiet. The great archangel, who was sitting in the seat across from him asked,

“Archangel Kaito, is something the matter?”

“ ...”

After a brief silence, Kaito let out a small sigh and opened his mouth,

“... I fail to see any significance in deciding the correct form of churches.”

With only those words, Kaito headed for the door.

“Wait right there, Kaito! This meeting isn’t over yet!”

Luka, who was seated furthest from him, stood to point accusingly in his direction.

“The reforming of churches has little to do with me. Even if it were to change, our mission will not waver. It would be far more productive to think of how to develop a new species of apple.”

Having said that, and with disregard to Luka’s further retorts, Kaito left the meeting hall.

“My, my, Lord Kaito is the same as always. Certainly, the wind is pleasant today, and the weather nice...”

“...tch! Kaito! Wait!”

Gaku, the young man who sat in the seat to Kaito's left, made an off-handed comment in a practiced tone. Luka ignored him, and quickly went to chase after Kaito. Although this was a familiar scene, the other angels, who had been so eager to speak earlier, seemed to have had the heat of their passions extinguished by Kaito's departure. They all sat quietly now.

"Now then, gentlemen. Just now, Archangel Kaito expressed his opinion that the reforming of the churches has little affect on us... Are there any that agree on his views?"

The great archangel said this, and swept his gaze around the Round Table where everyone was seated.

"Hmhmhm. In that case, this concludes today's meeting. For those proposing topics for the next meeting, I expect to see some meaningful themes."

And with that, that day's archangel meeting came to a close. Perhaps because there was no longer anyone



that wanted to discuss how the reforming of churches should be. To begin with, angels held very little interest in the human culture. Certainly, a discussion to develop a new species of apple would be more meaningful and beneficial to angels.

Celeste Garden, a place near the Tandolman Temple. Full of plants that exist only in Heaven, it is a popular resting place among angels. It is the place closest to the gate which separates Heaven and the human world, and is the first place that ascended human souls arrive at.

And in Celeste Garden, in a flower bed that was void of other angels, Kaito lay asleep. Although to be more accurate, he was floating, and therefore, floating asleep.

“What’re you doing?”

“! ... Oh, it’s you.”

Startled by the sudden noise, he sat up immediately. The youth with the blue eyes was laughing with a mischievous look on his face. It seemed that he had

snuck up to surprise him on purpose.

“Did I scare you?”

“... Yeah. Don’t sneak up like that without reason.”

“Sorry, sorry. I just felt like seeing Kaito’s surprised face.”

“ ... ”

“Isn’t it nice to do something other than scowl once in a while?”

“Mind your own business.”

“Before, you used to follow me everywhere for everything; you were so cute, a shy scaredy-cat... Why’d you have to turn into such a gloomy, sulky person?”

“You really don’t change. Despite only being a trainee, rushing into the front lines... You’re still as much of a nuisance as you were back then.”

“Those were the days, huh?”

“... I’m sure that you’re the only one that found any

enjoyment out of it.”

He remembered how cheerful he had been, even as they were almost burnt alive in the middle of the hellfire, until they were finally evacuated. Even now, the memory made him shiver.

“By the way, what were you doing? Although I agree that it’s nice weather for an afternoon nap.”

“I was waiting for those two.”

“Gaku and Luka? Didn’t they go down to the human world earlier?”

The original plan was that Kaito would go to patrol the human world tomorrow with his partner, the youth that stood before him now. Although ordinarily, two archangels, the leaders of their units, do not usually partner with each other, after more than half of their strength had fallen in the last major battle, everyone now goes to fight on the front lines in shifts, regardless of class. If all the archangels went full out with their strength, the weaker ones would be injured. That was why

archangels now paired with each other. Luka and Gaku, who were also a pair, had gone to the human world, and were supposed to have come back today to pass on the work to Kaito and his partner.

“There was an emergency call earlier. It seems that they managed to get on their trail.”

In other words—the path left by the demonic forces. Had Gaku and Luka been caught up in it? Ever since the Great War, the battlefield between demons and angels had been moved to the human world, and the skirmishes in the regions continued.

“That’s right. In that case, it’s no time to be sitting around idle, right? Should we go to meet them?”

“Yeah, they said they’d be coming back soon, but... I’ve already waited for more than three hours.”

“In that case, it may be faster to just go to them directly.”

“ ... ”

“I don’t think that those two could have been

defeated, but I'm still a little worried. Gaku is another story, but Luka is never late, right?"

"... What a troublesome pair."

"They sure are."

The Demon Subjugation Units. The Seventh Unit that Commander Leon had formerly led, was said to be among the elite. His two beloved pupils, using his teachings, continued to carry out the work of their deceased commander. After the Great War, their strength had gone through tremendous growth, and they were known as the strongest that Heaven had ever seen.

Bracing themselves, the two pairs of white wings danced down to the human world, the setting sun as the backdrop.

\*

Looking down from above, the grounds of the church were enveloped in something black. Most likely, it was a swarm of lesser demons. As they

seemed to be the jet black-winged puppets of higher-ranking demons, they had no consciousness of their own, and targeted holy energy indiscriminately. They were not very fearful enemies, but unfortunately, there were just too many of them this time. By the looks of it, about a five-hundred meter radius of the church's premises was covered in black. And in the very center of the squirming black mass, two white angels were fighting back.

With a sharp whistling sound, as if the surrounding air were being cut, the whip danced. In sync with those splendid, dance-like movements, the demons were purified instantly. Without a single wasted flick in her handling of the whip, Luka rapidly took down enemies from a distance.

On the opposite side, Gaku stood unmoving in a stance of drawing his sword. With a sharp ring, the taut air stopped for a moment. And then, he performed his sword-drawing technique at god speed—cutting down the enemy and sheathing the

sword again, all in one, clean action. In the blink of an eye, the enemies that had surrounded him had all disappeared. Only he was left standing within the perfect circle drawn by the reach of his sword... At least, that was how it should have been, normally.

“... Gaku! That’s dangerous! You almost hit me, too!!”

“Oh, Luka... I must also ask you to refrain from coming within range. Because you’d distracted me, I missed cutting down four of them.”

“What was that!? I should have been able to take down twenty of them with that last attack of mine! Your unnecessarily bulky body is a hindrance!”

“A-and what do you mean by that!? Earlier, I believe it was your whip that got in the way of my Holy Eggplant Blade, was it not?”

In the flocking army of lesser demons, they were the only two that stood to face them. As they stood with their backs to the other, this impressive combination displayed their signature moves, and at the same

time, hindered each other.

“Ah... Well, if I had to say it, it’s just as expected, hm?”

“ ...”

The two angels that had rushed to help, for a while, could only watch in a stunned disbelief at the dangerous situation the two had wound themselves in. In the first place, they had been made a pair in hopes of deepening the friendship of the two, whose personalities were polar opposites, but it seemed that the hurdle had been too high. It looked like their relationship may have only gotten even worse than before.

“Can’t be helped. Shall we lend a hand?”

“... Yeah.”

Suddenly, a bright white light flashed. When the light faded, the demons that had surrounded Luka and Gaku had all been purified, and from the thin smoke appeared two young men. The blue-eyed



youth, swinging his fists while performing agile jumps, was taking down one enemy after the other with a splendid display of martial arts. Standing back-to-back, the dark blue-eyed youth, slightly taller than the other and wearing an annoyed expression, fired with twin pistols at his targets with fine precision.

His fist was said to have power enough to destroy an entire mountain with a single strike, and the sound of the shots fired from his gun were said to resound until the ends of the world. This combination moved as if their two hearts were combined as one, wasting no time in clearing enemies both from both close and long range. The two angels that had been at odds during their own combat, could only stare, dumbfounded.

“You two—you came...”

“... I could have taken care of this much by myself.”

Although the two immediately said contradicting things, compared to before, a shade of relief colored

their expressions.

“Now then, let’s clean up.”

As soon as those words were said, a splendid kick spun through the air. Several lesser demons up against four novice archangels. In unison, all four of them carried out their signature techniques. Their victory was assured.

After all the lesser demons had been eliminated, the empty premises were carefully searched, but they were unable to find the higher-ranking demons that were thought to have been manipulating the army of lesser demons this time.

Because they had been recklessly using skills filled with holy energy, all the plants around them were blooming beautifully despite it being late fall. Excessive use of their powers caused the balance in the human world to become unstable, and although they had been warned by their superiors to refrain from using anything too strong, it couldn’t have been helped this time around. Wading through the

tall grasses, they came to a tree that was now only a snapped trunk.

“I wonder why only the plants around here are all ruined... Hm? Is this... bread?”

The blue-eyed angel found a hollow near the trees roots, hidden by the grass. Even if they were to assume this was a secret base made by a human child, there were no settlements nearby. And it was too small for a demon’s hideaway. However, it was suspicious that there was a piece of bread just lying in a place like this.

“I suppose we’ll have to do further investigation another day...”

Quietly, he arranged the grass back to its original position. He could hear the voice of the two that had started arguing. ‘Again?’ He thought, and when he went over to join them, he saw that Kaito was watching with disinterest. It didn’t seem like he had any plans to intervene. This kind of this was usually left to him, rather than Kaito.

“You guys~ Haven’t I told you to get along?”

“... But Gaku is...!”

“Are you directing the blame at me? In the first place, you...”

As expected, it wasn’t so simple to stop them once they’d started. Especially since this wasn’t the first time.

“Haa...”

“... Just give it up already.”

“You say that, but... If we leave things as they are, I’m sure that today’s events are just going to repeat again. And we’ll be the ones that have to clean up afterwards.”

“... You have a point.”

The angel with the dark blue eyes lapsed into thought for a while. Perhaps because the blue-eyed angel beside him had that forward personality of his, he seemed determined to mend the relationship between the other two, who were constantly

fighting over everything.

“Hey, you two, why do you have to fight every time you see each other?”

They both answered at the same time, “Because our personalities don’t match!”

“Oh? It seems to me that you’re actually pretty compatible, though. Then, how about we think about it this way? Aren’t there any parts of your personalities that *do* match? For example... hobbies, or something.”

“Hobbies...?” Again, they both answered in sync.

“R-right, right! Err, couldn’t it be that you two really do get along?”

That last part was muttered in a quiet voice, in hopes that they wouldn’t hear. And just as he’d wished, neither of them seemed to have caught what he’d said.

“My hobby, hm... I would say that my heart is most focused when it comes to swords. There is nothing

better. When I wield my sword, I become free of obstructive thoughts, and become more deeply connected to my own heart.”

“Ugh... How barbaric. Aren’t swords that kind of tools that demons use? *My* hobby is tea. I enjoy having tea time. Calming my heart and improving mental concentration.”

“I see... But, when you think about it in the end, don’t your hobbies resemble each other? I mean, they’re both hobbies that are centered around mentality. Then, how about this? Gaku, why not have tea together with Luka next time? And then after that, maybe you two could try doing sword practice together. You never know until you give it a shot!”

“Absolutely not!” Once again, there came a synchronized answer.

“I... I see. Looks like this is going to be harder than I thought...”

“Oi, you two,”

It was then that Kaito, who had been silent this entire time, finally opened his mouth. Somehow, the wrinkles on his brow seemed even deeper than they usually were.

“... Because we were called to come as soon as possible, we rushed over, and yet, when I waited at the arranged place for hours, neither of you showed up.”

“Uu...”

“Concerned, we came all the way to the human world, and find this disgraceful scene of archangels defending themselves against small fry demons.”

“Uuu...”

“And to top it off, without even a word of thanks for being saved, you continue to stubbornly quarrel amongst yourselves, and fail to find any valuable leads. ... The next time something like this happens, don’t expect me to help anymore.”

After being lectured with this much accuracy, their

temper from earlier seemed to have disappeared, and instead, both Gaku and Luka drooped with bowed heads. It seemed like they were reflecting on their actions.

“Now, now, Kaito. Let’s just let it slide today.”

“... You’re always too soft on them.”

“Really? Well, it’s fine either way. It’s pretty funny to see them being stupid like this when they’re arguing.”

“What!?” They both cried out indignantly.

“... Nonsense. In any case, I expect to see improved teamwork from now on.”

Kaito said this with a sharp glare. There was quite a bit of force behind it.

“ ... ”

“Ahaha. Earlier, their responses with completely in sync, down to the last breath, so I think their teamwork is already starting to improve. Well then, first off, we’ll start by accepting each other through



our hobbies, shall we? As soon as we get back to Heaven, we'll start making preparations for tea~ ...”

“!! That’s—” Already, they were protesting in unison.

Although they had begun to deny this suggestion, suddenly, they felt an alarming spiritual pressure. They could almost feel a chill as the blue-eyed youth said with a wide grin,

“You mean to say ‘yes sir,’ right?”

In the face of that smile, beautiful as blooming flowers, the two completely shrunk back. He was scarier than anyone when angered.

Afterwards, Gaku was invited to Luka’s tea time, and upon awakening to the world of tea, began to learn the basics of enjoying tea from her. Luka, as well, would accompany Gaku in her free time, and together, they engaged in mental training with their sword and whip. Unexpectedly, they realized how well their hobbies suited each other, and got along so well that it seemed unreal how much they used to

argue.

Ever since this incident, the bond strengthened between the two angels whose personalities were said to be polar opposites. Furthermore, the fact that the meddlesome blue-eyed one, and the dark blue-eyed angel (who pretended disinterest but was actually rather caring) supported them from the shadows—well, that's another story.

## **Chapter 2: The World Which He Left Behind**

At the site of where the sudden battle with the swarm of lesser demons had taken place the other day, the plant life was in full bloom, as it would be in springtime, despite winter being so near. This was due to all the holy energy that four archangels had released. And in the midst of the lush greenery, I had found only one, huge tree that remained withered.

There had to something going on here. With this withered tree as the center, the scenery of the entire one meter radius around it remained distinctly that of fall. In other words, it had not been affected by the holy energy. There was something unusual about this. Crouching down by the hollow in the tree and thinking for a moment, I noticed that the surrounding wind had suddenly changed.

Something was coming—

As I stood up, something long and narrow suddenly

came flying at me from behind. Dodging with a graceful turn, I rushed over to where the object had been thrown from, and without allowing the offender time to even make a sound, I bound both of his arms and legs with a holy chain. No matter how strong the demon was, once they were bound by their chain, they would not be able to exert any dark energy. The more they struggled, the more of their dark energy would be consumed, and their physical strength would only be sapped, as well. My captive was covered completely with a black robe, his face hidden from sight. All I could see was that he was putting up a desperate resistance.

“You’re only wasting your strength by doing that. Give it up,”

As I said this, I pulled the robe away from the figure. I was caught up in a moment of surprise, and found myself speechless.

“Damn it! Let go of me, bastard...!”

The one that continued to struggle while screaming

profanities was a small child. And in his hand, the same as what had been thrown at me earlier, he held a baguette.

At the altar of this desolate church, before me was a small boy. He had red hair, and almond-shaped eyes of the same color. He glared hard with me with eyes that gave off a rough, strong-willed impression, and somewhere behind all of that, some kind of sorrow. Everything he wore on his body, both his clothes and shoes, looked tattered.

“Now then... I have a few questions to ask you.”

“Let go! Let go of me, you perverted bastard!”

“... Well, I can't just let you go after you've said something like that. And who would that statement be directed at, exactly?”

“You, who else! Who goes and ties up someone with this weird chain all of a sudden!”

“Ahh... Those are called handcuffs. They're excellent tools for when you need to restrain

someone efficiently.”

“Like I care about that! Who d’you think you are, anyway!? Just barging into my hideout without permission...!”

Upon hearing the word “hideout,” it came to me. Did he mean the hollow of that tree? It didn’t seem like a space very worthy of being considered a hideout, though.

“Is that where you live? But it looked like just an old, withered tree to me...”

“...! I... Is there a problem with it just being an old tree...!?”

The boy turned his face away as if offended. Was that really the boy’s home? It was hard to imagine. And even if it were, no matter which way you looked at it, it was strange that only that area was unaffected by the holy energy.

“... If that really is your home, then where’s your family? Do they live with you in that tiny place?”

“... I don’t have a family.”

“Eh?”

“... I don’t have a father or a mother!! Is there a problem with me being alone!?”

He was alone. Did this small child really mean to say that he lived alone in that withered tree in the grass? But, how...? Suddenly, one possible answer came to mind.

“... Are you an orphan? You have nowhere to live, and you sleep in the hollow of that tree?”

“That’s what I’ve been saying this whole time!!”

“... And what about food?”

“tch!!”

“That bread you had earlier... Did you steal that from a nearby house?”

“ ... ”

“If you keep silent, I’ll take that as an affirmative, you know?”

“Kids like us can’t survive without resorting to stealing.”

“‘Us’?”

“... On this island, there’s a ton of other kids out there that’re just like me.”

Did he mean to say that there were many orphans in this region? Even in the human world, they were in a period of war. I had known from the reports that as a result of the wars that were constantly taking place in each region, orphans just like this boy had increased. Still, it was a very different thing to see a real orphan in front of me now, and hear things in his own words.

“I see... That seems rough, for you and the other orphans. If it’s alright with you... Do you mind showing me where your friends are right now?”

\*

After passing through the crowded main streets, we entered a back alley into the slums. The humans



that walked through the streets all seemed in a hurry to get somewhere. The blatant noise of the beggars and other vulgar people said a lot about the well-being of the place. And everywhere, there were orphans that put on airs of being like adults. Barefooted orphans wearing tattered clothing.

“... Hey. This is enough, right? I’ve brought you here as promised, so take these off.”

He was referring to the handcuffs restraining him. I had released the ones on his feet, but I realized that the boy’s hands were still bound. The moment they were removed, the boy immediately darted away from me. He still seemed rather cautious, and well, I couldn’t blame him.

As we’d been walking, the surrounding orphans had all began gathering around us—or more specifically, around the boy.

I adjusted the concentration on my holy energy, and made it so that my form would be visible to human eyes.

“Hey, hey, Leader, who’s this~? A friend?”

“Grown-ups... are scary.”

“I got a whole bunch today! Well, not as much as Leader, though.”

One after another, the orphans surrounded the boy and began talking. It seemed that the redhead boy was called their “leader” around here.

“Ah, I... kind of got caught up with some things, so... I haven’t gone to the job yet.”

By “job,” he probably meant stealing, and because it wasn’t only for himself, he must not have stolen enough for today’s portion.

“I see~ But, we’re always relying on Leader, so... Today, I’ll go!”

“No, wait! I’m gonna go today~”

The gathered orphans began fighting amongst themselves over who would be the one to go stealing.

“H-hey, you guys, calm down! Listen, alright? It’s not so easy to steal! Amateurs like you would be caught in no time, and thrown straight in jail.”

“J-jail...”

“Noo... I’m scared...”

“So that’s why, don’t even think about it, got it? Just like usual, I’ll be the one to go, and the rest of you will wait here like you’re s’posed to!”

“B-but Leader... There’s a grown-up right there.”

The young girl in the center of the group said this and pointed at me with a nervous face. For them, “grown-ups” didn’t seem to be good people.

“Ah... You’re right...”

The redhead boy looked over at me with a somewhat embarrassed expression. He still looked cautious, perhaps because of the fear of being cuffed earlier was still fresh in his mind.

“It’s alright. I’m not your enemy. I’m your leader’s assistant!”

“Assistant~?” A chorus of voices all questioned at once.

“Eh... Hey, wait a minute! What do you mean by that!?”

“It’ll be fine, just go along with it... Now then, Leader! Shall we get to the job at the usual bakery?”

As I started to walk by pushing his—the leader’s shoulders, he stared back at me with both doubt and caution.

So... stealing, huh? It was something that I had never had the experience of doing before, so right now, my heart was pounding.

\*

The job had been a success. A huge success. Maybe because I’d been there to help too, or maybe it was just luck, but either way, when we’d brought back the haul that was seemingly much more than usual, all the orphans who’d been waiting started to praise us.

“Uwah—! This is the new item from Maniela! I’ve been wanting to eat this~”

“Hey, hey! Was the big bro assistant able to keep up with Leader~?”

“... Well, I guess he was pretty good with matching my speed.”

The children were all happily stuffing their mouths with food. They must have always been so hungry, seeing as how they even ate all of the scraps that we’d picked up on the streets.

“Hey, why don’t you eat something too?”

The boy still hadn’t had a single bite of the food that he’d stolen.

“Eh? ... I’m fine. I can eat anytime... And anyway—”

“‘I’ve never had the need to eat,’ right?”

I finished his thought in a quiet voice, and the boy jumped back a step in surprise. He was staring at me with fearful eyes.

“... I noticed it, you know. Right from the beginning.”

“!!”

I had known if from the time that he'd first thrown that bread at me. He had been able to see me, an angel. And feeling an instinctual hostility, he had attacked me. At that place, his dark energy had been rejecting my own holy energy.

I told the other children that I had to leave for today, and taking the boy with me, went somewhere else. I turned the corner of a dimly-lit alleyway, and took him to the very back of the alley, where there were no other people around. He was trembling, his face pale.

“By the looks of it, you might still be too young to understand, but... Angels can't be seen by ordinary humans.”

“kh...!”

“Your friends were only able to see me because I'd intentionally made myself visible to them.”

One step at a time, the boy backed away while shaking.

“You were able to see me from the start, weren’t you? And once you saw you, you attacked me right away.”

“Ah... d-don’t come near me...”

“That was your instinct. You instinctively thought I—in other words, your enemy; an angel—was going to come after you.”

With a flutter, I revealed the white wings that I had been hiding until now.

“Stop it... Stop that...!”

“Since you’re a demon, are you afraid of me right now?”

“Wah...! Waaahhh!”

Frightened tears flowed from the boy’s red eyes. I couldn’t blame him. A normal demon wouldn’t even be able to breathe before the holy energy emitted by an archangel such as myself. And for a boy so young,

who was seeing an angel for the first time in his life, the damage had to be pretty bad.

“... Just kidding. Are you alright?”

As if to cancel out the taut atmosphere, I gently patted the boy’s head, who had been holding up beneath the holy energy until the last minute. With a jolt, he looked up at me, his face remaining a terrified one. His eyes showed confusion, and still, slight fear.

“I’m sorry for scaring you. From the start, I had no intention of harming you in any way.”

“... Eh?”

“Did you know that a while back, a large number of lesser demons appeared near your hideout?”

“Demons...?”

“Ahh~ I guess you weren’t around there then... Then, you’ve noticed that the scenery around your hideout suddenly changed a while back, right?”

“... Yeah. I went into town as usual, and... well, after



stealing and splitting it up with everyone, I came back here at night, and I was surprised ‘cause all the dead flowers were suddenly in bloom...”

“Did you notice anything different near your hideout before that day?”

“... Not really. No one usually goes around there. And since I’m the only one that knows where the hideout is, other than me, you were the first person to find it.”

I stared at his tear-streamed face. He still seemed a bit scared, but I could tell that he wasn’t trying to argue with me. And I could also see from his behavior that he wasn’t lying, either. It would seem that this boy didn’t have any clues for me. Looked like I’d be going back empty-handed on the investigation of the huge occurrence of demons.

“What’s... going to happen to me?”

“Hm? What d’you mean...?”

“You’re an angel, right...? You said that angels are

demons' enemies, didn't you...? So..."

"Hm, well let's see..."

As I looked at him with a grin, I saw his body visibly flinch. It was actually pretty amusing to tease him.

"Well, first off, I'll take you back to Heaven, and then you'll be put on trial. The courts in Heaven are very strict. First, a reaaaally scary angel that always has wrinkles on his forehead will read out a list of every bad thing that you've ever done on earth. He'll be the one checking *exactly* just how much you've stolen until now. And each time one of your crimes is read aloud, an Arrow of Judgment will pierce straight through your heart—"

"Uwaaaaaaahhh!!"

"Ahahaha...! I'm just joking!"

The boy was shaking with his face distorted in fear. Had I overdone it a little? At this rate, I was going to run out of people who could give me good reactions.

"J-joke...?"

“Right, right. I said so earlier, didn’t I? I don’t intend to do you any harm.”

“ ...”

“I’m serious. I was just teasing you since your reactions were so funny... Ah, I’m sorry! Don’t cry, okay?”

“Hn...”

The boy had started to cry again. I had never heard of demons being crybabies, but maybe it was because he was still a young child. Or, was it because...

“Hey, are you really a demon? Or, could it be that...”

“... My mom abandoned me... because I was a child of a demon. My mom was a human.”

“ ...!”

“But... I don’t care about that. It doesn’t matter whether I’m a demon or a human!”

When I heard this words, I felt something heavy

weigh down on my heart.

The doubts that I'd felt until now. The questions that I'm locked away in my heart with a key, where they couldn't be touched. And now, it was like this boy's words were breaking them free.

"I'm *me*... Not a demon, or a human. If I'm with others that are like me, that were abandoned by their normal, human parents and ended up alone because of the war, I can make friends with them. I've always been able to live without eating anything, too. And because of 'these', I've never gotten caught, no matter how much I've stolen."

*Flap—*

At his last words, he spread out a pair of small, jet black wings. The robe that we wore on his entire body must have been to hide these wings. Although he was half-human, as well, it seemed that he was born with more demonic features than human. The sorrow that I'd seen in his eyes when I'd first met him must have been because of the origin of his

birth.

“Those seem pretty reliable. If you’re able to escape from the old man at the bakery with those, then I might just lose in a match.”

“Eh...?”

“In a race, I mean. Humans do them too, right?”

“... Yeah.”

“So do angels—competitions to see who can fly the furthest. Are you ready? On your marks... Go!”

Saying this, I burst off into flight. Past the dimly-lit alley, past the town, and the hill. Behind me, the boy with the jet back wings was fighting to catch up. In Heaven, there was no one that could remain within my sights when it came to flight speed, but yet this budding child was able to keep up with my speed. His wing muscles seemed pretty good for being able to escape at the bakery, too.

“The first one to that apple tree on the top of that hill wins...!”

He was gradually picking up speed. Just a little more, and he would overtake me. It was fun. Just as I'd thought, flying was fun.

“Goaaaaaaaaal!”

Pivoting around at the top of the tree, I caught him as he kept flying forward with the momentum. There were very few angels that could keep up with me just a few seconds behind, so I couldn't help but look forward to the growth of his talent from now on. I carried the boy, still short of breath, until the bottom of the tree.

“That was fun, huh!”

“ ... ”

“Let's have a rematch sometime.”

“Eh...?”

“Until then, take this.”

“...? Wh-what is this?”

I held out to him a small, cross-shaped earring.

However, it wasn't merely a decoration. It was one of the protective gears that angels used, an object capable of accumulating holy energy temporarily. I explained that it was especially useful for when you were injured during wartime, and was a valuable item for accumulating holy power in Heaven.

However, the boy in front of me didn't seem to quite understand. Well, of course not. Demons had no reason to possess accessories with holy energy, and more than that, it would just be poison to them. For normal demons, that was.

"It's an amulet."

"Eh? An amulet...?"

"Yep... Since you're half human, it doesn't hurt even when you're touched by holy energy, right?"

"... Yeah."

"In that case, you should wear that on you. And then, on the off chance that an angel finds you, they won't know that you're a demon, as long as you don't show your wings."

“...!!”

“The holy energy in that earring will hide your dark energy. Normal demons would suffer damage if they continued to be touched by holy energy, however small, but it seems like you’ll be fine.”

“... Why... But, you’re an angel, and demons are angels’ enemies, right? So why are you helping me?”

“You’re the one that told me, right? It doesn’t matter whether you’re a demon or a human. So that’s why I don’t want to fight you.”

“But, angels and demons are...!”

“Among demons, there are even ones that were once angels. They’re called Fallen Angels. You may even meet one of them yourself one day.”

“...!”

“You’re the one that showed me, you know? That even with demons, there are some good ones out there.”

I said this with a smile. The boy’s anxious



expression gradually relaxed. And with an expression conflicted between happiness and sadness, tears began to form in his eyes again.

“In a lot of ways, today was pretty productive. The fact that demons are actually crybabies is a valuable piece of information.”

As I teased him again, the boy rushed at me angrily, still crying.

If only for this moment right now, would it be alright if I forgot about the mission my soul held?

To keep the balance of the human world. From the time that humans are born, and until their life ends, it is “our” job to support that cycle. And the ones that hinder that circulation, and try to destroy the world are none other than our enemies, demons.

Angels, humans, and demons—

Appearance-wise, all of them look very similar. Yes, just like this boy before me, both human and a demon, and myself. The only difference lies in the

color of our wings and the nature of our spirits. I felt like that was all it really was. Things like righteousness and evil, it's only that our viewpoints differed, and so perhaps, there does exist a way for us to coexist in peace.

Would there come a day that I would someday find the answer to that?

For now, I would simply continue to live to protect the important people in front of me.

That was how I chose to use my life.

# **Extra Story: Track Down the Seven Wonders of Heaven!**

“A hundred years prior, Rin was still a student at the Angel Training Academy.

While stuck in the library trying to finish an assignment, she happens upon a book written on ‘The Seven Wonders of Heaven’—

In order to solve the mystery of the Seven Wonders, Rin sets off to investigate with Gumi! What is the truth behind the Seven Wonders that has plunged Heaven in fear?!”

## **MISSION 1 - search for the song**

The Angel Training Academy—a school whose purpose is to prepare those born as angels for adulthood. Every year, many angels enroll in this school, the only existing educational institution in all of Heaven, and the students that complete the curriculum graduate with the title of “angel trainee”. The number of students is usually around

one thousand. Because the system is completely based on merit, with no regard to age, there are some that graduate not even a year after enrolling, and also some that aren't able to graduate even after a hundred years. The average student takes around thirty. During the strict training period, an angel acquires all the information, culture, techniques, and knowledge they need to become a fully-fledged angel.

“Ahh~... There's just no end~...”

Tolemante, the huge library adjacent to the Angel Training Academy. This library, which is shaped like a enormous dome, contains every book that exists in Heaven.

Regardless of the fact that it was just before closing hours, students would gather there in the evening after their day of classes and hurriedly rush to and fro around the spacious room. Since the deadline to submit a topic for the promotion exams was approaching, everyone was immersed in reading

their books. Even I, who usually hated studying, was focused in writing my paper. If I failed this time's exam, I would have to take another year of the same courses. I wanted to avoid that at all costs. For that reason, I had rushed to come and find materials for my topic, but was having trouble finding any useful references.

“Let's see... Heroes from the Great War era of four hundred years ago... Is it this one? ...Hm?”

It happened just as I was reaching up to pull out the thick history book that I'd been looking for. My eyes fell upon the small book—that said, it wasn't quite a properly bounded book; it looked like a simple notebook that someone had made by hand. Taking it out, I saw that it had only eight pages, including the table of contents; the author of the book wasn't even written anywhere.

“...The Seven Wonders... of Heaven...?”

“Riiiiiin, let's just give up and go home already~”

“...No, not yet.”

“But it’s almost almost curfew~ The dormitory head’s going to get mad at us again.”

“Please, Gumi! Just give me ten more minutes!”

“Sigh... Alright, fineee.”

Before us two angel students was a single apple tree. Surrounded by the lush greenery of Heaven’s land that was always brimming with energy was a withering, strangely-colored tree without a single leaf on it. While everything else in Heaven was enveloped in holy energy, only this tree was rooted here for hundreds of years in its completely withered state. I didn’t know the exact reason, but supposedly, it was the remains of the tree that had been set aflame by a demon’s attack during the Great Heaven War. Naturally, since it was withered, there was no fruit growing on the tree. With eyes as wide as plates, the two of us had been silently monitoring the withered tree since early that morning.

“If we just keep staring at it, I’m sure that eventually

an apple will grow and fall down...”

“...Are you suuure?”

“Of course I’m sure! Look, it’s even written right here!”

I said, and opened up the book for Gumi to see. It was the small book on “The Seven Wonders of Heaven” that I had happened to find in the library a week before. The book described a total of seven different “wonders,” with one on each page.

I Apple Which Grows on a Withered Tree

II Portrait of The Smiling Angel

III Gate Which Opens on Its Own

IV Blood Pond in the Water Garden

V Bird of Paradise with the Torn Mouth

VI Giant Angel of the Dark Night

VIII Hymn of Hell

The book was formatted like a simple picture book, with unique illustrations accompanied by a few

short sentences. The moment I had seen those gruesome illustrations, I was struck by both fear and an inexplicable interest. And so, deciding that I would solve all of these mysteries, I had gone and explained the situation to Gumi, my closest friend in school. At first, Gumi had been too scared to agree, but in the end, her curiosity got the better of her and she gladly agreed to assist with solving the mysteries.

After that, the two of us solved five of the mysteries in the span of a week. And now, we were trying to solve one of the two last remaining mysteries—  
“The Apple Which Grows on a Withered Tree”.

“Rin, this is probably just another weird rumor like the rest~”

“...It’s still too early to determine whether it’s just a rumor or not.”

“I dunno about that~”

As it turned out, the five “wonders” that we’d already solved had all been disappointingly lame



stories. The “Portrait of The Smiling Angel” was a painting of the Legendary Angel that hung by the Round Table at the Gran Dios Temple, but because it had originally been painted when the angel was smiling for the portrait, there was nothing wondrous about it at all. Although our enthusiasm had been dampened, we moved onto the next wonder, the “Gate Which Opens on Its Own,” which was the gate at the border between Heaven and the human world that opened by itself. However, apparently this happened quite often, and it was simply because people would freely pass through the gate whenever the angel on sentry duty carelessly dozed off.

Similarly, the “Blood Lake in the Water Garden” was caused by someone spilling a large amount of wine into the water, the “Giant Angel of the Dark Night” was just an archangel spreading their huge wings and doing strength training in the middle of the night, and the “Bird of Paradise with the Torn Mouth” was a bird whose owner had just painted for the Harvest Festival, and the pattern on its face only

made it appear as if its cheeks were actually torn.

In this way, the five mysteries that we'd tried so hard to investigate had all turned out to be assumptions or rumors, and were nothing more than misunderstandings in the end. We had been drawn in by the appeal of the word "Seven Wonders," but with each mystery that we solved, we started to feel more and more discouraged, as if our expectations had been betrayed.

"It's almost time, you know~ Forget it, Rin, I'm just going to leave without you!"

"What?! H-Hold up~! Just a little longer... Ah!!"

Just as Gumi had grown bored of the unchanging withered tree and was about to fly off, something red suddenly came falling down from the sky. I hurriedly pulled Gumi to my side and caught the red object with both hands. It was a magnificently red apple, perfectly ripe for eating.

"You're kidding... Is this for real?"

“Yeah... So it was really true...”

The two of us stared intently at the apple in my hands. It was an apple that had fallen from a branch on the withered tree that towered over our heads. We had just seen one of the Seven Wonders come true right before our very eyes. For a while, the two of us just stood there with expressions of awe, befuddled with the mysterious event, both wondrous and eerie, that had just occurred.

However, our rapture was soon interrupted by the sound of someone’s voice overhead.

“You guys—! Sorry about that—! No one’s hurt, right—?”

We looked up to see the archangel, Meiko. In both of her hands was an armful of apples.

“...Oh my~, is that right? Sorry to have given you two the wrong idea...”

After we had explained the gist of what we’d been up to, Meiko said this with a genuinely apologetic

face. Since we live close to each other, Meiko has often looked after me, even from before I'd started at the academy. Although Meiko is an archangel, because of her friendly personality, we've always been able to act casually around each other without having to worry about the formalities or our rank differences.

It would seem that today, Meiko had been transporting the apples to the venue of the Harvest Festival that was taking place in three days. The apple that had had fallen from overhead earlier had simply been one that had fallen off the pile that she'd been carrying. And at the same time, we had made a false assumption. In reality, the "Apple Which Grows on a Withered Tree" from the Seven Wonders had probably also been because of a misunderstanding like this one.

"Aww... I'm sure that this wonder was also just because someone happened to pass by overhead. How laaame."

Gumi said, genuinely disappointed. She must have been a bit excited about the mystery of the Seven Wonders, too.

“ ... ”

“Well, if you were resting under this tree and an apple suddenly came falling down, I think it can’t be helped that there’d be a misunderstanding~! How about thinking of it this way? On the contrary, it’s a pretty amazing coincidence that an apple would come falling down at that exact timing! So maybe it was due to some mysterious power that made it slip from my hand, you know~? Perhaps God felt sorry for how serious you two were about this and made a divine wind blow on purpose. Right? So cheer up, you two.”

“Miss Meiko...! Although that’s somehow not all that reassuring, thank you anyway. But at this rate, the last one that’s left, the ‘Hymn of Hell,’ is probably just going to another prank, I bet.”

Although Gumi said these words nonchalantly,

Meiko suddenly widened her eyes.

“Wait... did you say, Hymn of Hell?! Where in the world did you...?”

“? Umm... in this book called ‘The Seven Wonders of Heaven’...”

I showed the book to Meiko as I spoke. Her face, which had been so cheerful until a moment ago, gradually turned rigid. Something like fear flickered in her eyes.

“I think you’d better give up on this. I have a feeling that something bad is going to happen to you two.”

“?! Meiko, do you know something about this?”

“...I don’t know the exact details, either. But I remember hearing this hymn before. That’s why I want to warn you. Don’t get too involved in this matter. Understand?”

We couldn’t help but nod when Meiko sternly warned us in a tone she usually never used. Even Gumi wasn’t able to hide her shock at Meiko’s

sudden change in behavior. But after being warned like this, it was in an angel's nature to want to know the truth all the more. While we pretended that we would give up like we'd been told, in reality, our burning curiosity about the last of the Seven Wonders only grew stronger.

There is a resting spot located somewhere not too far from Griselle Water Garden. This popular resting spot, which has a clear view of the beautiful scenery of the garden, is always crowded with angels. One week after hearing Meiko's warning, our interest towards the Seven Wonders only continued to grow.

We had spent another day going around interviewing the upperclassman since early in the morning, but we were having a hard time getting any good results. The moment we mentioned the words, "Hymn of Hell," everyone we talked to started avoiding the topic with looks of fear on their faces. Every time this happened, our enthusiasm to solve the mystery grew stronger. Close upperclassman friends, teachers, even

upperclassman that just happened to pass by; everyone we asked reacted the same way. And now, we were sitting next to a group of archangels at the resting spot—If even they couldn't give them any answers, then we would have no choice but to consider giving up.

We glanced over at them. The four, who were all exceptionally well-known archangels, were chatting casually with one another. These four were often seen at archangel meetings, and as the leaders of Michael's angels (the army), there wasn't a day that we didn't hear about their accomplishments and heroic tales. We sometimes saw them with Meiko, but it was our first time seeing them from up close like this. After observing for a while longer, we stood up from their seats with determination.

"E-Excuse me, may we borrow a moment of your time? There's something we'd like to ask you."

The moment I called out to them, they all turned around at the same time. There weren't many



opportunities for mere students like ourselves to talk to angels of the archangel rank. We couldn't help but feel anxious when feeling their holy aura at such close proximity, which was hundreds of times more powerful than their own. I noticed that Gumi, who was standing behind me, was shaking while clutching the hem of her clothes. A cold sweat ran down my own back. Other than the Chief Executive archangel, the headmaster, there were only teachers ranging from lower rank to upper rank angels. Compared to the archangels that they were standing in front of us today, even the strongest upper rank angel we knew seemed overwhelmingly powerless.

“What's wrong? What do you need from us?”

The one who'd answered first was a youth with blue-green hair. He had a kind, gentle smile on his face, and gave off an overall friendly atmosphere.

“My, my, you both seem rather frightened... There's no need to be so nervous. We have no intention of

threatening our brethren, so not to worry. Ah, if you'd like, help yourselves to some tea."

The youth with the long, purple hair said, and offered tea to the both of us. Although we were still anxious, we said our thanks and accepted the tea. The tea that he had made tasted more delicious than any tea we had ever had before.

"Delicious...! It's... really delicious!"

Even Gumi, who had been shaking like a leaf behind me just a moment ago, seemed to have had her heart won over by this kind archangel.

"I'm glad to hear that. To tell the truth, this tea is a new recipe that I perfected only just yesterday. I used the highest grade of tea leaves from Via Hill, and brought them to Pastone Grasslands to have them thoroughly dried out, and then..."

"And? You two appear to be students. What was it that you wished to talk to us about?"

The archangel with long, pink hair and sharp eyes

said, interrupting the purple-haired archangel who had started a complex explanation on how he'd made the tea. We did a brief self-introduction, and then launched into an explanation of our topic.

“The truth is, we want to solve the mysteries of this book,”

I said, and placed the book of the Seven Wonders of Heaven in the middle of the table. Quizzically, the pink-haired archangel opened the book. The other archangels were also staring at the small book with curiosity.

“What we want to learn more about is the seventh wonder mentioned in this book on the Seven Wonders of Heaven, the ‘Hymn of Hell.’”

The moment I said this, all the archangels took on surprised faces, just as I had expected they would. However, there was just one thing different from all the upperclassmen that we'd asked up until now; there wasn't a single trace of fear in any of their expressions.

“We figured that archangels like yourselves, who are said to be Heaven’s elite in terms of knowledge, experience, and skill, might know something about the secret behind this wonder. We really want to learn what the last secret is, no matter what it takes. In this last week, we’ve solved all of the other six mysteries. The only left is the mystery of that hymn! If any of you know something about it, please tell us!”

I pleaded, and bowed with head in earnest. However, no matter how long I waited, the archangels before us spoke not a single word. Could I have possibly said something insensitive...?

“Pfft...”

It was the youth with the blue-green hair who broke the silence. If I recalled, his name was...

“Ahhahahahahahahahaha!”

He was holding his stomach while laughing, with a face that said he couldn’t hold it back anymore. There were even faint tears forming in his blue-

green eyes.

Becoming uneasy, I looked around at the other archangels and saw that the long-haired archangels on either side of him were both red-faced and looking away in what seemed like embarrassment.

And there was one more—a silent, blue-haired archangel who hadn't said a single word since we had arrived. He maintained an uninterested attitude and unyielding poker face, but was I just imagining that his hand which was holding a teacup had been frozen in midair for a while now?

“Ahh... I feel like it's been about a hundred years since I've laughed so hard. Thanks for telling such a funny joke. Anyway, I'm surprised that you two managed to find that book~ Sure, I don't mind telling you. About the final mystery of the Seven Wonders of Heaven. The truth is...”

“Wait!”

“?!”

Just as he had started to talk, the other three archangels interrupted him. Even the silent archangel that had yet to utter a word voiced his objection. Could it be that they all feared the final wonder just like Meiko did?

“What’s wrong, everyone? Even you, Kaito? Don’t tell me, you know the truth behind this ‘Hymn of Hell’...? Kuku—”

The blue-haired archangel started to laugh again, as if to tease the other three.

“...Joke’s over. Who is it? The fool that wrote this useless book.”

“The author... doesn’t seem to be mentioned anywhere...”

“Doesn’t matter who it is! Besides, this book is nothing more than child’s play. Completely insignificant. It’s nothing of interest.”

“Child’s play... Ah! Then, does that mean you’ll tell us? If it’s nothing important, then it’d be fine for

students like us to know about it, right?”

Gumi, who had been keeping quiet behind her the entire time, said this with shining eyes. She was just too straight-forward, but maybe because of that fact, it was easy for her to butt in with comments like this from time to time.

“Huh? Ah, weell... Th-that’s true... Umm...”

“J-Just so we’re clear, this is, err... merely a completely groundless, made-up fairy tale that has no connection to any of us...”

“Foolishness! I forbid any further mention of this topic. Understand?”

“Wha...! B-But...”

“This is an order issued by an archangel. Are we clear?”

The blue-haired archangel glared at us as he said this. His cold, intimidating air and glower made us immediately weak at the knees. All the while, the archangel with the blue-green hair continued to

laugh by himself. The blue-haired archangel repeated his warning, and then, after announcing that he was returning to work, he flew off. The other archangels seemed to have no intention of telling us anything either, and though we tried to pester them for more information, they soon also went back to work.

The only one who remained was the archangel with the blue-green hair. Since he was so friendly compared to the others, perhaps he would still be willing to tell us...?

“Aww, they’re so hopeless. That’s why they’re so unpopular. Honestly, there’s a ton of secrets I want to tell you, but if I just blurt them out without permission, there’re sure to get mad at me.”

After he winked at them with a fully mischievous smile, for some reason, we found ourselves unable to ask for anything else. Although his tone remained friendly, he also gave off a compelling air of dignity, reminding us that he was, after all, an archangel just



like the others.

“...I know, how about we make a promise? Once you two become a little older and advance to lower rank angels, I’ll tell you the truth behind the last of the Seven Wonders.”

A promise—

Until the day that he would tell us the secrets of that mystery... Would Gumi and I be able to make up for the absolute difference in ability between this archangel and ourselves?

“Understood. I’ll do my best and become a fully-fledged angel as quickly as possible.”

“M-Me too! I’ll do my best!”

“Yeah, it’s a promise. Rin and Gumi, it’s a promise between the three of us... No, between you and us archangels.”

Seeing him smile as he said this, strangely, we felt our burning curiosity start to quiet down. Surely, what lay ahead of us now was the true domain of

angels, completely different from our own. It was like he was warning us that we were still too young at the moment to set foot there.

It was little disappointing, but we could feel in his eyes a sense of anticipation towards our growth. That must have been why he'd made that promise. To angels, promises are second only to their worship of God; an oath between one chaste soul and another.

There was a possibility that even we would forget about this day once they were able to finally fulfill that promise. We were still only students at the time, not even formally angels yet. Once we graduated from the academy and became angel trainees, until the day we were recognized as fully-fledged angels... In other words, until we became lower rank angels, it might take us decades, or even a hundred years.

But, until that day comes, I'll—

“...And that’s what happened, a long time ago~ If I remember, it was probably about like, a hundred years ago.”

The blonde-haired girl sitting in front of me said while enjoying a slightly early afternoon tea.

It was a familiar scene at the resting spot by Griselle Water Garden. There was Rin, who was sitting in front of me and busily cycling through different facial expressions as she spoke. Watching her from the side while devouring a mouthful of apple was Gumi. Gaku was rambling about the deliciousness of the tea again as usual, and Luka was silently enjoying her own. The only one missing was our friend with the blue-green hair. My chest ached as the memory of his smile came back to me for the first time in a while.

Since that day—over a hundred years had gone by since that day I’d first spoken with Rin. Over the years, I have continued to serve as an archangel as before, but as for her, she had graduated from the

Angel Training Academy, become an angel trainee, and just the other day, finally advanced to the level of a lower rank angel. Gumi, who was sitting next to Rin, had also advanced at the same time. Although they once showed fear at my silent demeanor, after all this time had passed, I believe we get along quite casually now. More than anything, the two have grown into entirely different people, compared to how they used to act back then.

As I was starting to lose myself in these nostalgic memories, I noticed Rin was looking at me restlessly.

“Kaito~... So what’s why, it wouldn’t hurt to tell us now, right?”

“Hm...? Tell you what?”

“The Seven Wonders! The final mystery of the Seven Wonders~!”

As she spoke, she took out a small book from some hiding place and spread it out before me, grinning as if she were plotting some sinister trick. Just a

moment ago, I had been thinking to myself about how she had matured compared to a hundred years ago, but evidently, I had only been imagining it.

“...Come to think of it, that does sound a bit familiar.”

“It ‘sounds’ familiar~?! I was talking about it just now! Kaito, you weren’t listening at all, were you?!”

“Calm down, Rin! I’m sure that even Archangel Kaito would have trouble remembering something from so long ago right away. I mean, even when you told me yesterday, it took me a whole hour to remember.”

“That’s right, Rin. Even now, I still have no recollection of what you’re talking about.”

“Same goes for me... Anyhow, there are plenty of things in life that you don’t need to force yourself to remember.”

“...Ughhh, you’re all a bunch of meanies~! How could you all just forget~! It’s probably because

you're all getting old! Your memories are all starting to fail because of old age~!"

"Ahh~ That's probably it~! Everyone is getting up there in the years, after all~"

The way the two of them were suddenly treating us like old people stabbed into me like a sharp knife. Gaku and Luka also seemed to have been affected in the same way; they both wore tense faces. If we considered our ages as angels, naturally, it was outrageous to say that we were aging and in the prime of our lives, but before Rin and Gumi... a pair of novice angels, we were unable to fight back. No matter what we said, it was sure to come right back at us.

"As you were saying... What was this about Seven Wonders? Although first of all, that's a rather shady-looking book."

"The Seven Wonders of Heaven! I found this while I was cleaning my room yesterday! I want to know about the final mystery of the Seven Wonders, the

‘Hymn of Hell’~!”

“!!”

The “Hymn of Hell” —this situation was starting to feel a bit familiar. No, I remembered it quite clearly. Although she had looked much younger then, she had come asking us this once before with the same serious look. Looking around me, Gaku and Luka were also wearing somewhat nostalgic expressions. Their faces were beat red, and they were frozen in place with their mouths hanging open in surprise.

“Remember? I even made a promise with him~! He said it was a promise between the two of us and your four archangels~ He promised that you’d tell us once we advanced to lower rank angels! He, made, me, a, promise~!”

“ ... ”

I let out a small sigh as the girl continued to ask persistently with the demeanor of a child, acting nothing at all like a lower rank angel. Even if I were to say that it was pointless now that the one who had

made the promise was no longer here, I was certain that she wouldn't hear of it.

As I tried to think of how to handle this situation, my thoughts drifted to the memory of the horrid incident that had occurred back when I was still a novice archangel.

## **MISSION 2 - let the song reach**

My vision filled with wreckage, as far as the eye could see. The vast amount of black smoke were the fumes from the lower rank demons that we had defeated just moments before. The four of us hadn't fought side by side like this since the Great War. Having been worried for Gaku and Luka, who had been late in returning, I had gone down to the human world with my partner with the blue-green eyes, and from there, engaged in a large scale battle. After we'd eliminated the mass of demons using our full extent of holy power and had finished a basic survey of the battlefield, we were just about to return to Heaven.



“Huh...? That’s weird~”

“Hmm, I too, felt that something was strange.”

“Same goes for me...”

“...Wait, then it’s the same for all of us?”

“ ...”

Since the battle had ended and up until this moment, strangely, not a single one of us were oblivious to this fact. I was sure that all of us had only made it appear as if we were casually using bold moves one after another in quick succession, while in reality, all of us had been struggling. The other possibility was that sense of rivalry felt between those of similar in power level had unconsciously gone beyond their limits. Regardless, all of us that were present no longer cared what had led to this. Thinking about such things wasn’t going to be help us move forward. Right, we couldn’t move forward—because the fact was, none of us could fly right now.

“Umm... If we turn left on this street...”

“Hold on a minute! I’m certain that we went down this street a while ago.”

“That weapon shop over there! There’s no mistake. A long time ago while I was on patrol, I accidentally dropped the sheath of the blade I used two generations ago into the chimney of that shop...”

“ ... ”

It was well into the night by now, about the time that humans would be enjoying their evening meal. Meanwhile, four archangels, myself included, were wandering a small town in the human world. However, we had, by no means, lost our way... was what I wanted to believe.

“Honestly, why is it that the terrain of this world is so complex! We aren’t getting anywhere!”

“There’s no use complaining now, Luka. After all, right now, we’re... lost. So it’s all the same no matter where we end up.”

“Hrmm... ‘Even angels fall from apple trees.’ It is at this moment that those words left by our predecessors resonate deeply in my heart.”

Even ‘he,’ who was usually so cheerful, was now more weak-spirited and haggard than I had ever seen him before. To think that we had carefully used up all of our holy power in the battle with the demons, to the point that we had lost our strength to fly; it was such a foolish act, I never would have imagined it possible. And what was more, it would have been understandable if we were unable to return to Heaven due to being injured in battle, however, all of us were practically unscratched. How ironic was it that we, the archangels that stood at the top of Michael’s angels, had made the blunder of recklessly using up our power, something that even inexperienced angel students knew not to do?

I don’t think I’ve ever done anything that made me hate myself as much I did at that moment. In the first place, who could imagine the ridiculous sight of four angels sluggishly walking along as if crawling

on the ground? Even in the images drawn by those overly imaginative humans, I've never once seen a depiction of lost angels walking merrily together side by side.

“Ah! I see a ship over there!”

A ship...

If not mistaken, we were currently on a small island a short ways from the Alphine mainland. Surely, this ship was a ferry between here and the mainland. If we got on this ship, we were sure to be able to reach Rulen Island, the Alphine mainland. And from there, all that was left was to go to the Claude Cathedral located in the center of the mainland and recover enough holy power to fly back to Heaven.

Due to the fact that our forms were invisible to human eyes, we were able to board the ship without having to pay the fare. With a ship of this size, it was unlikely to sink due to the added weight of a mere four people. After a while, the steam whistle

sounded, and the ship departed. While being exposed to the lake breeze, I gazed down at the pitch black lake below from the ship deck. As it were, none of us could fly right now. In our present state, what would happen if we were to fall from the ship...?

Perhaps due to exhaustion, weak thoughts that I would never consider normally filled my head. I suddenly heard Gaku moan in agony beside me. He seemed ill. Come to think of it, since boarding the ship, I had also been feeling something unpleasant, separate from my fatigue. Nearby, a human man was bent over the railing, facing the lake. Upon closer inspection, I saw vomit expelling from his mouth. I suddenly came to an understanding.

This must be the “seasickness phenomenon” that occurs among humans. This “ship” was a vehicle that swayed a great deal. It was only natural that humans, who usually spend their time treading the earth, would begin to lose their normal bodily functions after spending long periods of time aboard

this unstable, swaying vehicle. Angels, too, are unused to being on a vehicle that travels by floating along water. All of us had already fallen victim to this seasickness. The continued violent swaying was making my stomach feel uneasy. How much longer would we have to endure this swaying to reach the island that was only an arm's reach away if we had been able to fly?

"I would like to go home soon..."

All of us silently agreed with the words that Gaku muttered and gazed up at the distant sky. Never was I more glad that angels couldn't be seen by humans. If we were to have been seen in our exhausted, disgraceful state, no doubt it would be passed down to their successors as some strange tale.

We arrived at Rulen Island, the center of Alphine, just as the morning sun was about to rise. Worn out from an entire night of being rocked by the ship, we felt something akin to nostalgia upon setting foot on stable land again. Dragging along our exhausted

bodies, we continued to walk slowly through the town; it was already past noon by the time we finally arrived at the Claude Cathedral. The sky was slowly beginning to cloud over and show signs of impending rain.

“Won’t be long now, huh?”

‘He’ said, wearily combing back his blue-green hair. These days, it was a huge city built by the hands of the humans, but originally, the land of Alphine had belonged to Heaven. The Claude Cathedral is only the first of several cathedrals remaining throughout the regions that hold the abundant life essence and holy energy inherited from when Alphine was once situated in Heaven. If we rested there, we were sure to recover more than enough of our holy power. We were nearly there; the final hurdle... Climbing to the top of this long spiral staircase.

“Looking up at it from down here, it’s quite spectacular.”

“Rather a meaningless structure, these stairs are. I

don't recall them being here when it was a part of Heaven. I see no point in making them so long."

"Hrmm... I think I shall first use my sword as a walking stick..."

"...We've no choice but to treat it as training for our leg muscles."

With expressions more melancholy than the color of the cloudy, overcast sky above, the four of us slowly began to climb the stairs. Meanwhile, numerous humans continued to overtake us from behind, and somehow, it felt damaging to our pride. Once we made it back to Heaven, it might be a good idea to suggest a physical training program as regimen for future battles with the demons. No matter how poor we were at all forms of walking, it was humiliating to be worse at it than humans. If they incorporated a walking regimen in the human world, such to accustom angel to getting around without use of their wings, even if one were to become lost and unable to return to Heaven, they would then have



no trouble making their way to a cathedral. Thinking of such things, at last, we had climbed to the top of the stairs. After becoming lost on Minole Island and having experienced seasickness, it would seem that our bodies had hardened a good deal.

Passing through the main gates beyond the stairs, we opened the door of the cathedral. There was no one else inside, neither angel nor human. The power of holy energy slowly filled our bodies.

“This is supposed to be the place where holy energy is the strongest, but at this rate, we’ll probably have to stay here for a week before we recover enough.”

“An entire week?!”

“I’m worried about the state of the war.”

“And our subordinates, as well...”

In our hurry to rush to the battlefield, my partner and I hadn’t brought along any healing items. And neither had Luka and Gaku, it would seem. It was difficult to recover our power by normal means in

the human world, which was lacking in holy energy. A single night's of rest in Heaven's living quarters would be enough to make a full recovery from this level of exhaustion, but in the human world, even staying at the strongest power spot required a week to recover. Unfortunately, there was no avoiding this fact.

However, as expected, it would be bad for four archangels to be away from the tides of the war for an entire week, with their whereabouts unknown. In the past month, battles had been breaking out across all the regions, and grew more violent with each passing day. We had to return as soon as possible, receive status reports from our subordinates who had remained in Heaven, and issue new orders. Although a week is not a terribly long period of time for angels, with the war situation changing every moment, our absence was likely to have an effect in the long run. And furthermore, for four archangels to be missing simultaneously would have an overall effect on Heaven's movement.

“Alright! Let’s call for help!”

“What?! You’re joking! As if I could do something so disgraceful.”

“Mm... Certainly, it would be a bit rash to call for help.”

“ ...”

We all had different opinions. Should we put out a rescue request right away, or wait a week and return on our own?

“Well, I guess it would be pretty embarrassing to admit that all four of us got lost in the human world despite being archangels, and above all, had to be rescued because we wouldn’t fly home... But do we really have to stay here for a week just because it’d be humiliating? Our subordinates are probably worried about us. And we have to help decide what’s our next move in the war.”

“That may be so, but don’t you care what happens to our dignity? The idea of four archangels putting out

a rescue request... If I were one of the subordinates, I'd be thoroughly disappointed."

"Hrmm... Quite the difficult decision. Naturally, I'm concerned about our subordinates as well, but surely, our dignity would be lost, and our pride shattered to pieces."

" ... "

We were having a hard time coming to an agreement. That was how difficult the situation was. As the leaders of Michael's army, our subordinates, as well as the entirety of heaven, place immense trust in the archangels. If not, we would not be fit for even squad leaders. Michael's archangels are the role models for all angels, so to speak, and must always be invincible and flawless. If it were to be known that we had struggled with small fry demons and gotten lost as well, our dignity would immediately fall, the morale of the soldiers fighting in the battlefields would plummet; it would have an immediate effect on the war situation. This wasn't

simply about protecting ourselves.

“Even if we think of it that way, it isn’t getting us anywhere... So, Luka and Gaku are absolutely against calling for help, huh... Guess that can’t be helped. In that case, there’s only one way to settle it. With the method most suited for us angel leaders, who pride ourselves in serving God.”

Saying this, ‘he’ searched his pocket and took out a coin. On the front was an image of a pair of wings, and on the back, an apple. These coins are used in all transactions in Heaven, similar to the “currency” used in the human world. But unlike humans, it is a tool used them not only to determine the worth of physical things, but to measure the worth of things from all angles.

“Okay, here I go~! Which side?”

“Heads!”

“Then I’ll go with tails. What about you, Kaito?”

“ ... ”

“Guess that means you’re neutral? We’re just going to decide between the three of us then, alright? Go!”

Throwing the coin up high, it spun around in the air while reflecting the light from the stain glass windows, and then returned back down to his hand as if drawn to it.

“There.”

It was tails. This was the answer that “God” had given them. This coin toss, which was naturally assumed to embody the will of God, which held superiority over the power of angels, was often used when there was a split in opinions. Of course, it’s used only in the event that a decision can’t be reached even after considerable effort and speculation.

“Now then, let’s call for help straight away.”

As my partner smiled and put the coin back in his pocket, he continued speaking casually as if he had expected this result from the very beginning. It was said that those angels who are loved by God are

made allies of the natural course of things, to a frightening extent. If my memory serves correctly, I had never once seen him lose in a coin toss.

“Fine. Since it’s the will of God, I suppose we have no choice.”

“Speaking of which, how exactly are we supposed to call for help? I’m afraid I’m not familiar with the specifics.”

It was perfectly reasonable for Gaku not to know. Once one became an archangel, we experienced fighting in the front lines during the war, but becoming lost in the human world like this was nearly unheard of. Rather, most of our experiences were receiving reports of pleas for rescue and responding to them, and therefore, until now, none of us had ever imagined that we would be the ones who needed rescuing.

“Ahhh~ Now that you mention it, how are we supposed to do it again? ...I wonder if it’s written in Michael’s Handbook... Umm, let’s see here~ ...

‘New Laws of Heaven, Article 23, Section 11: In the event that an angel is in distress in the human world, they are to request help from their brethren by offering up a holy song to Heaven. For those that hear this rescue request, they are to have someone of upper rank or higher accompany them and go to their rescue as quickly as possible.’ ...Is what it says. So basically, all we have to do is sing a song?”

“A song...? I’ve never had to actually sing a song before.”

“Neither have I... When did they begin using this kind of system, I wonder? I don’t remember having this in our younger days.”

“A song, hm? Are you to say that a song is enough to save Heaven? Foolishness.”

“...No, I think it’s us that are going to be saved.”

Never once in my long lifespan have I ever learned how to sing. To begin with, the soldiers enlisted to Michael’s army have no use for songs. It was my first time hearing of song being used as a distress



signal; surely, it was some kind of new trial run that had been recently implemented. Naturally, having already been serving as officers for so long, we had not been educated on such things.

“Looks like we’re in a bind. Truth is, I don’t know all that much about singing either... For now, how about we just start singing something? Anything should work. It’ll be enough if our voices can reach Heaven, after all.”

“You have a point.”

Coming to an agreement, we each began to sing on our own. We were all inexperienced in singing, but that was of no importance. All we had to do was desperately try and convey this miserable situation with our voices. With bodies that were too powerless to even fly in the human world, casting away our pride as archangels, all we had to do was sing. What mattered was that we express our exhaustion, and the various sentimental emotions that had gathered in our chests.

We each sang freely for nearly three hours, but there was absolutely no reaction from the sky. What was the meaning of this...? The distance from Heaven to this earth was such that it could easily be covered within an hour. Was it because our voices hadn't been loud enough because of our voices being unaccustomed to singing?

Next, we each tried singing even more intensely. We sang as if thrusting out the entirety of our feelings of exhaustion and fatigue from the depths of our bodies. However, no matter how much time passed, help did not arrive.

After waiting a while longer, we discussed what our songs were lacking, and this time, we tried to sing in sync by uniting our hearts as one, since it was possible that our four scattered voices were cancelling each other's out. Although the plan was to sing "in sync," because of our lack of technique and knowledge of singing, we ignored the complicated things such as pitch and rhythm. We focused simply on how to express the emotions that we currently

felt in our hearts—anger, displeasure, exhaustion, humiliation, irritation, annoyance—as best as we could. Since it was a hymn, the lyrics were supposed to be a plea for help and a prayer to God, but because it didn't match our emotions, this proved to be another difficulty. However, it was probably not a bad thing that our humiliation would further amplify the expression of emotions in our song. Once we started singing, I do believe it came out being expressed in a rather fine manner. As we became accustomed to it, at intervals we began snapping our fingers, whistling, and stomping our feet. Surprisingly, singing was quite fun—although none of us said it out loud, we were likely all thinking the same thing. And so, we became absorbed in the song and continued to sing. Day and night, we continued to sing, performing various variations and arrangements. Three days passed like this in the blink of an eye, and then a week, by which time we had fully recovered our strength, and without needing to depend on anyone else, we

returned to Heaven. Although it was strange that help never arrived, we decided that it was all the better that we had been able to maintain our pride by returning on our own.

When the four of us returned to heaven, our subordinates were waiting for us at the gate, but they seemed worried as they greeted us. All of them had on expressions of fear and seemed terribly worried about us.

We immediately asked for a status report of the war situation and were told that, without a way of countering against the most frightening of assaults that the demons had launched since the creation of Heaven, many had been patiently enduring on the battlefield. It was then that the Great Archangel had determined the possibility that the Devil himself had joined the battle, and issued an emergency alert to all of Heaven. Once receiving this order, Michael's angels fought bravely at the grueling battlefields and overwhelmed the demon forces in all regions. We had expected that our absence would

cause morale to drop, but it was incredible that there had instead been a breakthrough. We briefly praised our subordinates who had gone to the battlefields and breathed sighs of relief.

And when we asked what kind of frightening assaults they had been up against in our absence, all of them spoke of the exact same thing.

“For this past week, a most frightening singing voice, as if creeping up from the below the earth, was heard coming from the human world, non stop. It must have been the marching song of the demon soldiers, although some believe it was some new form of attack on the spirit... In the most terrifying voices that we have ever heard, they were begging for praise and help from God. As we were certain that it was those spiteful demons, they were most likely attempting to catch us off guard and to lure us out by feigning surrender! The pitch, rhythm, and everything about the song was truly chaotic and wretched-sounding; it was full of malice, clearly for the purpose of destroying us from the inside by

targeting the minds of pure and righteous angels. Ahh, truly, it was a horrible singing voice, as if it embodied all the negative emotions to be found in the world. Most fittingly, we have dubbed it the Hymn of Hell.”

# Appendix: The Original Vocaloid Song

*Song title:*

Japanese: 秘蜜〜黒の誓い〜

Romaji: *Himitsu Kuro no Chikai*

English: *Secret Black Oath*

Official English: *Himitsu Oath of Black*

*Singers:*

*Kagamine Rin and Kagamine Len*

*Producers:*

Hitoshizuku-P (music, lyrics)

Yama△ (mix)

Suzunosuke (illust, video)

Singer	Color
Rin	Orange
Len	Brown

<b>Japanese</b>	<b>Romaji</b>	<b>English</b>
羽墮とした 墮天使は 汚れた契り に身をゆだ ねて 愛し合った 過去でさえ も その手で消 し去ってし まったの	hane otoshita datenshi wa kegareta chigiri ni mi o yudane te aishi atta kako de sae mo sono te de keshi satte shimatta no	The wingless fallen angel Surrendered herself to the contract of evil In the past they even loved each other She ended it by her own hand
傷ついた迷 子の天使	kizu tsuita maigo no tenshi	The stray heartbroken angel
夕暮れの街 彷徨い 綺麗な瞳を	yūgure no machi samayoi kirei na hitomi	Wandered in a town at dusk



もった	o motta	And came across a girl
-----	---------	------------------------

ひとりの少女と出会う	hitori no shōjo to deau	With beautiful eyes
------------	----------------------------	---------------------

目が合った その瞬間に	me ga atta sono shunkan ni	At the moment their eyes met
----------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------------

恋に落ちた 哀れな天使 は	koi ni ochita aware na tenshi wa	The pathetic angel fell for her
---------------------	--	------------------------------------

許されない 想い募るま ま	yurusare nai omoi tsunoru mama	As the forbidden feelings grew inside her
---------------------	--------------------------------------	---

禁忌の箱を 開けた	kinki no hako o aketa	She opened Pandora's box
--------------	--------------------------	-----------------------------

求めたものは 笑顔の裏に隠され た	motometa mono wa egao no ura ni kakusareta	What she wished for was the forbidden fruit
-------------------------	---	--

禁断の果実	kindan no kajitsu	Hidden behind a smile
人と天使 許されない 恋 叶える 為に 全てを壊す だけ	hito to tenshi yurusare nai koi kanaeru tame ni subete o kowasu dake	To make the the forbidden love between a human and an angel happen All she had to do was destroy everything
汚れない心 捨てて 君を愛して 生きられる なら この羽さえ 切り捨てて 悪魔に身を 委ねてしま おう	kegare nai kokoro sute te kimi o aishi te iki rareru nara kono han sae kiri sute te akuma ni mi o yudane te shimaō	I'll abandon my pure heart If I'm allowed to live and love you, I won't hesitate to cut off these wings Let me surrender myself to the devil

漆黒に染まる花嫁	shikkoku ni somaru hanayome	The black stained bride
聖なる誓いの場所で	sei naru chikai no basho de	At the place she was to take the holy vow
儚い瞳で笑う	hakanai hitomi de warau	She came across a mysterious boy
不思議な少年と出会う	fushigi na shōnen to deau	Smiling with mournful eyes

目が合ったその瞬間に	me ga atta sono shunkan ni	At the moment their eyes met
------------	----------------------------	------------------------------

恋に落ちた哀れな少女は	koi ni ochita aware na shōjo wa	The pathetic girl fell for him
-------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------------

許されない想い募るまま	yurusare nai omoi tsunoru mama	As the forbidden feelings grew inside her
-------------	--------------------------------	---

全てを裏	subete o	She betrayed
------	----------	--------------

切った	uragitta	everything
手に入れた のは この 手の中	te ni ireta nowa kono te no naka	What they have in their hands is
焦がれ続け た欲望の果 実	kogare tsuzuketa yokubō no kajitsu	The fruit of lust they had desired
求め合って 奪い合う 熱	motome atte ubai au netsu	Combining in a feverish frenzy
清らかなる 誓いさえも 侵していく	kiyoraka naru chikai sae mo okashi te iku	Even their pure vow Is breaking a sin
繋ぎ合った 過去を全て 粉々に消し 去ってし	tsunagi atta kako o subete konagona ni keshi satte	The pieces of the past that linked us After removing them

まったら	shimattara	all
後悔さえ悔 やむほど	kōkai sae kuyamu hodo	As though mourning would repent us
羽君に溺れ て堕ちてい くだけ	kimi ni obore te ochi te iku dake	Let me plunge in and drown inside you

ah-禁忌の罪 は	ah-kinki no tsumi wa	ah-the forbidden sin
癒えぬ傷と なつて刻ま れ続け	ienu kizu to natte kizamare tsuzuke	Kept cutting at the unhealed wound
怒れる裁き の矢は	ikareru sabaki no ya wa	The angry judgement of the arrow
漆黒の少女 を貫く	shikkoku no shōjo o tsuranuku	Penetrated the pitch- black girl

羽墮とした	hane otoshita	The wingless fallen
-------	---------------	---------------------

墮天使は	datenshi wa	angel
汚れた契り	kegareta	
を解き放つ	chigiri o toki	Freed from the
て	hanatte	contract of evil
その命と引	sono inochi to	In exchange for her
き換えに	hiki kae ni	own life
一枚の羽だ	ichimai no	
けを残して	hane dake o	Leaving one feather
	nokoshi te	
少女を救っ	shōjo o sukutte	She saved the girl
て		
消え去った		
の	kie satta no	And vanished away
羽墮とした	hane otoshita	The wingless fallen
墮天使と	datenshi to	angel
汚れた黒に	kegareta kuro	And the sinful black-
染まる花嫁	ni somaru	stained bride
	hanayome	

地の底へ墮ちてさえも	chi no soko e ochi te sae mo	Even after falling into the abyss
------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------------------

誓いの楔を 絡め合って	chikai no kusabi o karamae atte	The vows' wedge entwine them
----------------	---------------------------------------	---------------------------------

許されない 罪を抱えて いく	yurusare nai tsumi o kakae te iku	Retaining their unforgivable sin
----------------------	---	-------------------------------------

罪の果実が 朽ち果てた 時	tsumi no kajitsu ga kuchi hateta toki	When the fruit of sin falls into decay
---------------------	--	---

再び巡り合 うその日ま で	futatabi meguri au sono hi made	They can meet again, till then...
---------------------	---------------------------------------	--------------------------------------

Romaji transliteration and English translation by  
Motokokusanagi.